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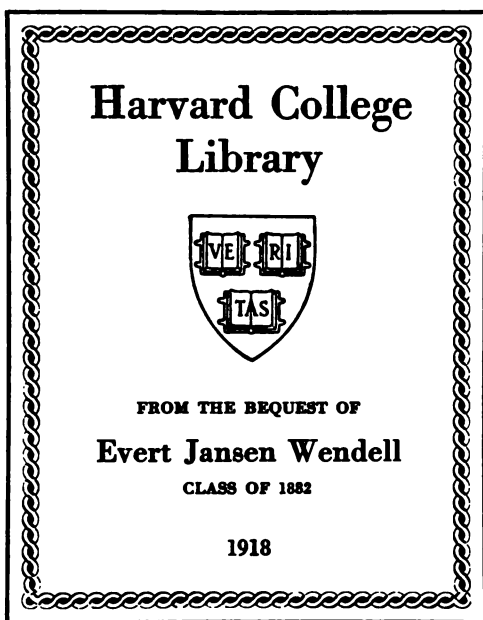
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LEFT IN CHARGE

BY

CLARA MORRIS

AUTHOR OF

"LIFE ON THE STAGE," "A PASTEBOARD CROWN,"
"A SILENT SINGER," ETC.



G. W. DILLINGHAM COMPANY
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

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Left in Charge.

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LEFT IN CHARGE

CHAPTER I

Two No-Account Strangers

The day was hot, very, unmistakably a blazing July day that kicking over the traces, had torn itself loose from all conventional restraints of the calendar and was burning its way through the last Saturday in April.

To the two no-account strangers within her gates that morning, Quincy, Illinois, was neither attractive nor impressive, for that was not the Quincy of to-day, who points to her cathedral, her colleges and churches; her mills, factories and breweries; her stately public buildings, and, lifting her head high, declares, "I am the third great city of my State!" Oh, no! the Quincy of that far April morning was a lazy young trollop, lounging on her bluff, with the mighty Mississippi gurgling muddily at her feet.

The city had the air of a country town—hitching posts were at a premium. Farmers' wagons were everywhere. The one-mule dray was frequent; cows walked calmly in the public square and browsed with-

out molestation. Many men rode to their business on small, badly groomed horses, which often carried a few feet of rope swinging about their necks, which rope later on would serve in place of hitching-strap.

The air of the place was one of peaceful, easy-going well-being. A few men there were even then, wise, far-sighted, who, standing on high places and looking ahead with clear vision, saw plainly the black shadow cast by the approaching war—but they kept stern silence, while the people went their way, bartering, gossiping, buying and selling with all the happy blindness of moles.

At street corners or hotel bars, or wherever men were apt to congregate, to talk race or fair or politics, the name of Lincoln was beginning to be heard, and often it was received with a sort of good-humored contempt: "What, that long-legged gorniky from up Springfield way? Talks all right by hisself, yes," 'twas said, "but wait till we sic Stephen A. Douglas onter him and I reckon he won't be so gassy, after that!"

Many people argued that the great orator was neither fish, flesh nor fowl, because he was farmer, lawyer and politician—yet be it noted that among all the worshipers of Douglas or of Breckenridge who poked fun at the "long-legged new feller" who dared to oppose these mighty ones, there was never a sneer at the character of that Abe Lincoln, whose appearance they

ridiculed and whose audacity they resented—then, as always, the clean wholesomeness of the man's life commanded respect, which was the more remarkable because this was the prophet's own country.

On this very hot day, out on the sidewalk in front of a livery-stable, stood a woman and a child—waiting. Tired, dusty and travel-stained, both showing traces of their bolt-upright, all-night ride in the stuffy cars of that period. A large carpet-bag rested at the woman's feet, but the child clung resolutely to a small two-handled basket, whose decoration of brick-red roses and ultramarine forget-me-nots under the heat of the sun smelt mightily of fresh paint. The woman was about twenty-eight years old and distinctly good-looking, in spite of roughened hair, circled eyes, and a great and evident anxiety. The age of the child was not quite eight—as measured by years of actual time lived, but if measured by experience, by trouble and by knowledge, she was an ancient little crone. Not pretty, like her mother, just a fair, blue-eyed, brown-haired, very sensitive child—who had already learned the two great lessons, obedience and silence. So now, though she longed to ask many questions about the strange sights around them, she did not venture to disturb her mother, but surreptitiously strove to smooth out the dents and creases in the knees of her white pantalettes, blew the soot off her precious, though ill-smelling, basket; and, finally,

fell upon the carpet-bag and with her small handkerchief carefully polished the round brass lock.

A long, tired sigh made her look up and remark as in answer: "It takes them a long while to harness up, don't it, Mama?" and just then there rattled out of the stable such an amazing vehicle that the child gurgled with sudden laughter and exclaimed: "Oh, Mama! what's that? It isn't a buggy, nor a carriage, nor a cab, nor—"

A sharp angry "Hush!" silenced the child, and in a moment the bag was inside, the child was tossed in after it by the driver, and, as the woman taking her seat leaned forward to give him a brass trunk check, a man from the office came hurrying out with a dirty note-book open in his hand, and referring to an entry there, he asked, "Is this right, now? Rig engaged by Mrs. Selina Marsh, to take self, child and trunk to—to—this says two places—I don't make it out quite."

"I wish to go to a farmhouse that is some place between the villages of Marceline and Lima," explained Mrs. Marsh.

"Well, that's not very plain," grinned the man, who put his foot on the step and stared impudently at the woman, whose annoyance was evident. "I guess we'll have ter talk this over ag'in. How can I tell the distance these horses will be called on ter travel?"

"Ah, go on!" suddenly interrupted the driver, "she's

payin' for ther eighteen mile ter ther furthest town, Lima, and thar can't be no wanderin' round lookin' for ther place, 'cause this lady says ther stage passes ther house. So it's got ter be on ther edge of ther Warsaw Road—and no more talk erbout it."

"Huh! yer damn smart, hain't you!" Then, with a sneer, to the woman: "You'd made money by takin' the stage at quarter the expense."

And once more the driver came to the rescue, as he gathered up the reins, by remarking: "How could she take ther stage that left before ther train com' in? Yes 'm, I'll go ter ther depot for your trunk. Git up, thar! git up!" and they started on the last stage of that journey that now looked so mad an undertaking, to the woman who had taken this expensive means of reaching her destination—because Tuesday was the next stage-day and she had not money enough to pay hotel expenses for so long a wait.

Parting with one's last dollar is a painful and disheartening experience at any time, but when it comes to a woman who is a stranger in a strange place it becomes almost tragic. A man can laugh and rough it, for so long as there are hallways and porticos in town and barns in the country, he will find some lodging-place, but a woman must have, not only something to sleep on, but a clean sheet to cover it, and of the two the sheet is the more important. To the self-respecting bread-winner, a few dollars in the pocket-book becomes

a veritable tower of strength; the secret knowledge of its power to shelter and protect gives courage, cheer and good-fellowship. But take away the few dollars, the woman feels humbled and helpless, she smarts under a hundred wounds not meant for her, suspects a slight in each indifferent word, and suffocates under insults never given. And here was this woman—Selina Marsh—with just enough education to make her resent her own ignorance, enough refinement to make rough surroundings painful to her; sensitive, impulsive, quick-tempered, proud-spirited and penniless—no wonder the woman's expression was dark, no wonder the child shivered nervously as she watched, anxious little soul, and when a few pennies had been given to the contemptuous baggage-man for producing the trunk and fastening it on behind, she asked: "Isn't that man going to give you anything at all for the money, Mama?" And being answered with a curt "No!" she looked back at the man a moment, and then sighed: "Oh, I 'spose you gave it to him 'cause his breeches is split—but I don't believe he split 'em for us, Mama."

A conclusion most just, but badly received, for though the driver's shoulders shook with suppressed laughter, Mrs. Marsh grabbed the little one by the arm, gave her one sweeping brush down from chin to bottom of short skirt, yanked her hat down firmly over her eyes, so that the whole fair earth was cut off from view, while her own small countenance temporarily ceased to

exist, and remarked: "May, it's traveling that makes you talk so much! *Now!*" (seating the child with stunning emphasis) "you will be seen, not heard, for the rest of this drive!"

And from behind the extinguishing straw hat a muffled voice of polite acquiescence responded: "Yes, ma'm!"

After a time the driver came to the rescue—a cheerfully inquisitive soul, who chewed unceasingly and spat artistically, but had questioned his fare vainly as to her business in these parts, for she sorely puzzled him. Her regular features, her correct speech and her reserved manners—said lady, while her hands (she wore the black mitts of the period), said as plainly—workingwoman. Silence being painful to him, he turned and asked: "If the little gal wouldn't like ter be histed over and set by him awiles?"

Mrs. Marsh giving leave and the extinguishing hat being pushed back a bit, small May was soon absorbing the wonders of this new world about her. But first of all was she interested in the strange vehicle they rode in. "It rattles awful," she remarked, "will the sticks come out of the wheels?"

"Guess not," answered the man doubtfully, "though it's powerful dried out!"

May looked out sideways: "Don't you never, never wash it?" she asked.

"Wal, yes—sometimes, I reckon. But the feller

that's got charge of it's a lazy cuss. It don't berlong ter me, you know!"

"Oh," said May, gravely, "you must be very glad of that," and followed the man's guffaw of laughter with the comment: "You laugh a good deal for a grown-up—don't you?"

"Wal, I reckon I do," answered he, aiming at an oddly shaped stone by the roadside and striking it fairly, as the brown stain proved, "But it's a heap healthier ter laugh than ter cry—sure as yer live, Cissie!"

The child winced: "Please, Mr. Driver, my name's May," she gently suggested.

"Oh, short for Mary or——"

"No—not short for anything—that's the whole of it. I'd like to be Antoinette or Adelaide, but," with a heavy sigh, "you have to be well off to have a name of that kind."

"Not out here, yer don't—not by a jugful!" warmly replied the driver. "Why, my first sister's Mehitabel Anne, and my second's Josephine Louise, an' our hull tribe hain't worth a pint of ground nuts. You must 'er com' from a queer sort o' place if you hain't 'lowed all the names yer want."

"It isn't a queer place at all," said the child, with tears in her eyes. "Cleveland is a clean city and no pigs nor cows go about loose in it; and the men wear their trouser's legs outside their boots—not all scrouged into them. And the Lake"—a sob was swallowed down

with difficulty—"sometimes it's cross and the wind off it most throws you down, but other times the sun warms it and makes it feel good and it stretches itself out and gets bluer and bluer and just winks its eyes and blinks all over until you'd like to kiss it, if you could. But here—Mr. Driver, it didn't rain here yesterday, did it?"

"Good Lawd! Cissie—er—I mean May, don't yer see the ground's like ashes? 'Course it hain't rained!"

"Then what's the matter with your river that it's so muddy? I thought the rain had riled it up, or that the boats stirred up the mud—but my Mama thinks it never settles and gets clear, no, never at all."

"Reckon your Mar's plumb right, Cis—er, May. Now yer Paw" (insinuatingly), "he'd know all about it."

"I haven't got any father," coldly replied May. "But it's too bad about the river. It's big of course, but it's a lot prettier on the map than it's down on the levi—I guess I don't know that word right. Levee? Thank you, sir!"

"An' whar's yer pore Par buried?" asked the driver, harking back to his quest for information.

The child's face flushed: "I don't know!" she answered.

"Dunno? an' such a peart little thing as you be—an' yer said he died in Cleveland, too?"

"No, I did not! I said we came from Cleveland," replied the badgered child.

"How long has he been dead—yer pore Paw? I see your Mar's not in mournin'?"

"Mourning!" exclaimed May, in almost a tone of indignation—then changing it suddenly, she replied irritably: "He's been dead always, I mean always to me! 'Cause" (she turned her crimson face away), "'cause I can't remember him!"

"Hu—huh!" thought the human gimlet, "she's a widder then, from the East! Kinder toney too, for I see she's ben ring-married. Thought first-off she might be a grass-widder—but that young-un's too dog-gorn'd smart ter be fooled by any one—an' she says her father's dead! But what under the canopy has she got ter do with the Gallaways? That's what beats me!" He glanced back. His fare was sitting with closed eyes and tight-clasped hands and a sort of thrill ran over him as he noted that the dark eyelashes were all enmeshed with tears. "By God!" he exclaimed, "I hope she hain't expectin' anythin' from that Gallaway crowd! Say, little gal, 'spose you and me get down an' walk this hill—ter save the horses? They're rather soft fed an' prairie horses hain't no good anyway for even our few up-pulls."

And so, side by side, they climbed the long but not steep incline, and so profound was the reverie of Selina Parsell Marsh that she was alike unconscious of the halt, of the resumed motion or of the cries of rapture May indulged in, when the dark purplish-gray band

she had so long seen from the green prairie's level developed at last into for-true woods—always a place of mystery, but never so wonderful as when late in April nature sweetly, silently works her great transformation scene. The beauty of it all filled the child with a rapturous excitement, plainly indicated by changing color, quickened breathing and the involuntary opening and closing of her fat little hands. But the utterly incomprehensible thing, that which made her eyes look like a pair of blue and white saucers, was the trick the trees had of clothing and then unclothing themselves. She had looked ahead to where the trees were massed together and had seen—oh, quite plainly seen! great mists of many greens, gray-green, pure apple-green and green that was almost yellow; and the highest tree tops were clouded over with a thin fleece of clearest red, while behind and through and beneath it all, looped from tree to sapling, from sapling to bush, were transparent banners of bronze. And while she was gasping at the wonder of beauty, they reached the place, and she raised amazed eyes to bare boughs and twigs clear—etched on heaven's blue plate! "Oh!" she exclaimed, in a tremulous voice, "where are they? What's become of them, Mr. Driver?"

"Become of what?"

"The rosy and green clouds?"

"Why, honey," answered he, somewhat puzzled, "'tain't time for no rosy clouds till sunset. Then perhaps—"

"No! no!" the child persisted. "I mean the leaf clouds. I saw them, and now—" (piteously) "now the trees are bare like winter. Just see for yourself—that high one was as red—" ("Humph! soft maple," muttered the man), "and this one this way was all kind of greeny-brown." ("El-um," interjected the man.)

Then he suddenly put a great hand on the child's shoulder and patting it vigorously, remarked: "Why, honey-gal, sharp as you be, you dunno one darn thing 'bout woods and sech like, do yer? Now, don't you take on 'bout them leaves goin' back on yer. Let me see if I can show you 'bout it! I haint got no book larnin'—can't read my own name" ("Oh," gasped the child, red with vicarious shame for such a confession from a grown-up), "but I hain't quite a plumb fool!" He looked about him vaguely, as if seeking mental help, and spat reflectively at a sleeping shoat by the roadside and May accusingly remarked: "You missed, *that time!*"

Irritated by both failure and comment, he said, hotly: "Wal, I'll be doggorn'd if ever you miss anything that's goin' on. You've got more eyes in your head than Cal Toler's peacock's got in his tail!"

"Are you angry at me?" anxiously asked May—who had memories and therefore anxieties of her own. "Perhaps I joggled you when you spitted at the pig?" she suggested with a conciliatory smile, meant to hide the

fear of a whipping for impertinence to a grown-up.

"Lawd, no! Cissie—er—Antoinette, Adelaide, Sophonisbie, May! Whoa, thar! Here—hold on ter these reins a minute—I want'er go acrost the road. They won't run as long as they see me all the time."

Proudly May held the lines and loudly she cleared her throat to attract her mother's attention to her high estate. But Selina Marsh might have been in a trance—so motionless she sat.

In a few moments the man came back and climbing to his place, resumed the reins and began the explanation by which he hoped to prove that the trees had not gone back on May. "Yer saw it," he acknowledged, "yes, I know yer did—an' then yer didn't see it—but that was your fault, Cis—er, May! Now yer hold on 'er minute, an' I'll show yer! See this?"—and he pulled from his old coat pocket a good-sized twig from a bush. The stem was white and smooth and hard. "Putty bare, hain't it?"

"Please let me have it in my hand," begged May. "How pretty and clean it is! and oh! oh! Mr. Driver, look on the end, it's a for-true, alive green bud! What a pity you broke it, it was going to be a leaf!"

"Is it green?" grinned the driver.

"Yes, and down at the bottom it has a little bit of shiny brown!"

"Ther stem looks mighty bare though, don't it? when yer kinder hold it off—eh? Now see this," and

he drew out a half-dozen twigs with not a leaf unfolded, but each was rich with swollen buds of varying tints and colors. And when the child, wide-eyed, saw him bunch them together and hold them off a little distance, she gave a sudden cry of delighted comprehension.

"Oh, the rosy-green clouds and the leaves I thought I saw, were only thousands and thousands of buds, then? When will they be for-true leaves?"

"Erbout next week, I reckon!"

"And which of the trees will be red, please?"

"Why, none, honey! them's only the buds. The hull woods'll be jes' green, an' all the same—'cept some'll be a little yallerer than others."

"Oh!" exclaimed the child regretfully. "I wish just a few could stay only buds, just where they are promising they're going to be rosy leaves, and ain't!"

Poor little maid—she was young to discover for herself that the promise is often sweeter than the fulfilment.

CHAPTER II

A Step in the Dark

And Selina Parsell Marsh—where had memory taken her? Surely her thoughts must have traveled fast and far, thus to have carried her beyond the reach even of her child's voice. For twenty long years she had craved one thing passionately, and now that she approached the goal of her desire she grew frightened, and not daring to face the future, she turned her thoughts to the past—going back—back—back, till at last she saw herself in a clearing in a Canadian forest, a little girl, humbly clad but clean and whole, whose sturdy short legs had tramped unweariedly through the dense wood because her heart was so full of love and pride that almost she could have flown, with eager passionate love for the mother she was coming to visit, and pride because the woman who hired her had made her a tiny gift, and was allowing her two hours of study a week, under the direction of the resident governess.

Such a happy, loving, mother-hungry little girl came running from the woods and down the lane and then—a great stillness! a house with closed eyes and lips it seemed, for no smoke rose from the chimney, no

latch-string hung from the door, no bark came from the empty kennel, no stamping from the barn! Deserted house and abandoned child faced each other—blankly, forlornly!

At last a long wail broke from the childish lips: "Mother! Mother! oh, I want you so!" and falling upon the door-step she buried her face in her arms and sobbed and wept, till she could scarcely see. And though twenty years separated this Selina Parsell Marsh from that little stricken Selina whom she saw sobbing on the door-step of the empty house, the same cry was struggling up from her hungry heart: "Mother Mother! I want you so!"

With blackly frowning brows, she recalled how she had crept to the door of the nearest neighbor, a mile and a half deeper in the wood, to ask when her mother had died; and the sight of the child, there alone, and her innocent question quite upset the poor woman, who in a burst of angry tears, cried: "For God's sake, child, don't you know? Your mother's not dead—though she'd rather be! No, it isn't death—it's Mormons! Oh, you poor little thing! Don't look like that! They've lied to her, for I heard her myself, crying and telling that beast of an Elder she'd never go without her other little girl, that was out at work already, at eight years old. And he was mad as a hornet, and his eyes snapped and he told her 'she was a very troublesome woman and should be disciplined,'

and then the other Elder—an oily, smug fellow, prodded him with his elbow and said low, ‘Take care, you may lose ’em—wait till you get ’em away.’ And then he smoothed your mother over and promised—I heard him—that the ‘The train of wagons should turn off the main road at 430 by Mr. Humphries—so she could get you.’”

“Then Mother didn’t leave me on purpose, without good-bye, did she, Mrs. Carter?” agonizedly questioned the child.

“Of course she didn’t! Lord knows what she did when she found they’d lied to her!”

“And little brother and sister—are they gone too?”

The woman turned her eyes away from the quivering face, lifted questioningly: “Yes—poor little things! of course they had to go with their mother! Now, you sit down on this creepie and rest you and drink a bowl of milk—you are all tired out.”

Hungry and thirsty, the child drank the tear-splashed milk gratefully, and as she carefully placed the empty blue bowl on the table, she asked: “Mrs. Carter, do you think I could walk to Grandpa’s house before it gets dark?”

And at that question the good-hearted woman simply dropped in a chair, covered her face with her checked apron and sobbed aloud. Presently a small, scared voice asked: “My—my Grandma—Isn’t she to home?”

Mrs. Carter rocked her body back and forth and

shook her head. A pause followed in which it seemed to little Selina that her heart had broken in her breast. Then in a dull, lifeless voice, she asked: "Has any one else gone to be Mormons besides Mother and Johnnie and little Kate?"

"Any one else?" repeated the weeping woman, indignantly. "Why, more than half the settlement's gone! The Carmichaels sold their fine farm for half its value. The Bradford brothers, with their cabins up and their land just cleared, have pulled up stumps and started with their wives for the 'New Canaan.' Your grandfather was only mildly interested in the preaching of the missionaries all the winter, but your Aunt Elizabeth—you know, child, how she drives and bullies and domineers over every soul about her—well, she was just stung with the Mormon bee first thing. The Elder see her power quick enough, and he bowed down to her and promised her crowns and high positions and things in heaven, and before that in the Zion that's to be in Missouri—if she brought her family into the fold.

"At last she overbore your Grandpa Parsell and the old home was given up. When the things were all put in the wagon, and they were ready to start, your grandma, she looked and looked at the house and then bent her head and kissed the gate, and when the old man came to lead her to the wagon she looked mournful-like into his eyes and said; 'You have killed me,

William!’ and he went all of a tremble, and drove away to join the others looking broken-spirited and down-hearted. Your own folks—your mother and the children were in the wagon with Widow Dreene and her big boy; and they were to meet as many as twenty wagons from around Little York; and they were to make their way to Missouri or Illinois, and they were all praising and praying-crazy over the new religion, all except Grandmother Parsell and her widowed daughter-in-law, your mother. And for fear you may think it’s just neglect of *you* if no letter comes, I just may as well say, child, that though the Carmichaels have loads of friends, and though the new Mormons promised their kith and kin here to write once every two weeks or positively every month—not one line has come back yet—not one! And I’ve heard from a circuit-riding preacher that Joseph Smith, who is the Mormon Prophet, is a whisky-drinking, tobacco-using, big, laughing roysterer, who says, when he is found hopelessly drunk, that he did it ‘to test the faith of his followers.’ He’s a nice sort of prophet. But when old William Parsell and Thomas Carmichael find him out, they will drop Mormonism pretty quick—I know that, for they are decent, God-fearing men, who lead clean lives.”

And then came the heart-broken cry of the child: “Everybody’s left me—everybody! Oh, what shall I do?”

And the woman, ordinarily rough of manner and speech, softened by certain happy expectations, tried to comfort the lonely and deserted little Selina, and kept her over night, tucking her into the foot of her own bed, where she softly cried herself to sleep. Next day she went back to the people, who had hired her principally as flying messenger for the whole family, carrying orders from mistress to maid, from master to man, watching over visiting babies, or lending a hand at a belated churning. And being quick, bright and obedient, she was much favored, if hardly worked, by Mrs. Humphries. Her manners and pronunciation were corrected, her reading was overlooked carefully. She grew tall and pretty and was advanced to a responsible position in the household. But, oh, how she longed for one touch of her mother's hand on her hair, for one kiss from the lips that had been so velvet-soft on her cheek! But no word ever came. She used, too, sometimes to be seized with an agony of longing for a sight of the chubby, dimpled, fair-haired baby sister Kate she had adored, and for the slender, good-looking brother John.

Her position was a trying one. She might not of course associate on equal terms with the family's friends—yet Mrs. Humphries did not wish her to become familiar with the servants; so she became a book-worm.

Then suddenly, for family reasons, the Humphries

returned to England, and at fifteen, utterly alone, she faced the world from which she had to wring the living that it owed her. No wonder the woman's face grew dark as she recalled those years of bitter experience—for beauty to a poor girl becomes either a golden asset or a whip of many thongs. She would have accepted over-work and under-payment without a murmur, could she have lived in peace; but she was always being driven from pillar to post, from one situation to another, because her exceptional good looks either aroused injurious suspicion or brought forth downright brutal insult. And so the country-bred, homeless girl, who had been compelled to seek the city for employment, led a weary life, without friendships, without pleasures of any kind—often without sufficient food, never quite comfortably clothed, sometimes in desperate need. When secret insult drove her from a situation, forced to the companionship of the vulgar illiterate, there were times when in her misery she almost cursed Mrs. Humphries for thus unfitting her for her humble state of life. "She should have done much less or a little more for me," she used to think, "For if only she had had me taught writing, I might easily be a nursery governess." But strange as it seemed, Mrs. Humphries had always put off till summer—till winter—till spring, those lessons in writing promised so long but never given.

Therefore young Selina Parsell, well-informed as

he drew out a half-dozen twigs with not a leaf unfolded, but each was rich with swollen buds of varying tints and colors. And when the child, wide-eyed, saw him bunch them together and hold them off a little distance, she gave a sudden cry of delighted comprehension.

"Oh, the rosy-green clouds and the leaves I thought I saw, were only thousands and thousands of buds, then? When will they be for-true leaves?"

"Erbout next week, I reckon!"

"And which of the trees will be red, please?"

"Why, none, honey! them's only the buds. The hull woods'll be jes' green, an' all the same—'cept some'll be a little yallerer than others."

"Oh!" exclaimed the child regretfully. "I wish just a few could stay only buds, just where they are promising they're going to be rosy leaves, and ain't!"

Poor little maid—she was young to discover for herself that the promise is often sweeter than the fulfillment.

CHAPTER II

A Step in the Dark

And Selina Parsell Marsh—where had memory taken her? Surely her thoughts must have traveled fast and far, thus to have carried her beyond the reach even of her child's voice. For twenty long years she had craved one thing passionately, and now that she approached the goal of her desire she grew frightened, and not daring to face the future, she turned her thoughts to the past—going back—back—back, till at last she saw herself in a clearing in a Canadian forest, a little girl, humbly clad but clean and whole, whose sturdy short legs had tramped unweariedly through the dense wood because her heart was so full of love and pride that almost she could have flown, with eager passionate love for the mother she was coming to visit, and pride because the woman who hired her had made her a tiny gift, and was allowing her two hours of study a week, under the direction of the resident governess.

Such a happy, loving, mother-hungry little girl came running from the woods and down the lane and then—a great stillness! a house with closed eyes and lips it seemed, for no smoke rose from the chimney, no

latch-string hung from the door, no bark came from the empty kennel, no stamping from the barn! Deserted house and abandoned child faced each other—blankly, forlornly!

At last a long wail broke from the childish lips: "Mother! Mother! oh, I want you so!" and falling upon the door-step she buried her face in her arms and sobbed and wept, till she could scarcely see. And though twenty years separated this Selina Parsell Marsh from that little stricken Selina whom she saw sobbing on the door-step of the empty house, the same cry was struggling up from her hungry heart: "Mother Mother! I want you so!"

With blackly frowning brows, she recalled how she had crept to the door of the nearest neighbor, a mile and a half deeper in the wood, to ask when her mother had died; and the sight of the child, there alone, and her innocent question quite upset the poor woman, who in a burst of angry tears, cried: "For God's sake, child, don't you know? Your mother's not dead—though she'd rather be! No, it isn't death—it's Mormons! Oh, you poor little thing! Don't look like that! They've lied to her, for I heard her myself, crying and telling that beast of an Elder she'd never go without her other little girl, that was out at work already, at eight years old. And he was mad as a hornet, and his eyes snapped and he told her 'she was a very troublesome woman and should be disciplined,'

and then the other Elder—an oily, smug fellow, prodded him with his elbow and said low, ‘Take care, you may lose ’em—wait till you get ’em away.’ And then he smoothed your mother over and promised—I heard him—that the ‘*One*’ train of wagons should turn off the main road at 4³⁰ by Mr. Humphries—so she could get you.”

“Then Mother didn’t leave me on purpose, without good-bye, did she, Mrs. Carter?” agonizedly questioned the child.

“Of course she didn’t! Lord knows what she did when she found they’d lied to her!”

“And little brother and sister—are they gone too?”

The woman turned her eyes away from the quivering face, lifted questioningly: “Yes—poor little things! of course they had to go with their mother! Now, you sit down on this creepie and rest you and drink a bowl of milk—you are all tired out.”

Hungry and thirsty, the child drank the tear-splashed milk gratefully, and as she carefully placed the empty blue bowl on the table, she asked: “Mrs. Carter, do you think I could walk to Grandpa’s house before it gets dark?”

And at that question the good-hearted woman simply dropped in a chair, covered her face with her checked apron and sobbed aloud. Presently a small, scared voice asked: “My—my Grandma— isn’t she to home?”

Mrs. Carter rocked her body back and forth and

shook her head. A pause followed in which it seemed to little Selina that her heart had broken in her breast. Then in a dull, lifeless voice, she asked: "Has any one else gone to be Mormons besides Mother and Johnnie and little Kate?"

"Any one else?" repeated the weeping woman, indignantly. "Why, more than half the settlement's gone! The Carmichaels sold their fine farm for half its value. The Bradford brothers, with their cabins up and their land just cleared, have pulled up stumps and started with their wives for the 'New Canaan.' Your grandfather was only mildly interested in the preaching of the missionaries all the winter, but your Aunt Elizabeth—you know, child, how she drives and bullies and domineers over every soul about her—well, she was just stung with the Mormon bee first thing. The Elder see her power quick enough, and he bowed down to her and promised her crowns and high positions and things in heaven, and before that in the Zion that's to be in Missouri—if she brought her family into the fold.

"At last she overbore your Grandpa Parsell and the old home was given up. When the things were all put in the wagon, and they were ready to start, your grandma, she looked and looked at the house and then bent her head and kissed the gate, and when the old man came to lead her to the wagon she looked mournful-like into his eyes and said; 'You have killed me,

William!’ and he went all of a tremble, and drove away to join the others looking broken-spirited and down-hearted. Your own folks—your mother and the children were in the wagon with Widow Dreene and her big boy; and they were to meet as many as twenty wagons from around Little York; and they were to make their way to Missouri or Illinois, and they were all praising and praying-crazy over the new religion, all except Grandmother Parsell and her widowed daughter-in-law, your mother. And for fear you may think it’s just neglect of *you* if no letter comes, I just may as well say, child, that though the Carmichaels have loads of friends, and though the new Mormons promised their kith and kin here to write once every two weeks or positively every month—not one line has come back yet—not one! And I’ve heard from a circuit-riding preacher that Joseph Smith, who is the Mormon Prophet, is a whisky-drinking, tobacco-using, big, laughing roysterer, who says, when he is found hopelessly drunk, that he did it ‘to test the faith of his followers.’ He’s a nice sort of prophet. But when old William Parsell and Thomas Carmichael find him out, they will drop Mormonism pretty quick—I know that, for they are decent, God-fearing men, who lead clean lives.”

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Therefore young Selina Parsell, well-informed as

she was, could not write a line and was barely able to recognize her own name when she saw it in script. Then there came a day when a mistress, deciding she would like to have some window curtains like the valance and hangings of her bed, sent Selina to the principal draper's shop on Toronto's main business street, to match most exactly a scrap of the flowered chintz of her liking. Having failed to find the required material in the first place tried, Selina walked along, inspecting the window displays, when suddenly she thought she saw the counterpart of her sample. Taking the scrap from her purse, she stepped close to the shop-window to make comparison—when she was roughly jostled first on one side, then on the other, and became conscious of a great confusion in the street. Cab-drivers hastily climbed to their boxes; men as well as women, ran, darting into any shop door that was open. Some one cried out in dashing past her: "Run, you fool!" and then followed the cry, "Mad dog!" and in the same moment the animal was before her, lurching unsteadily yet rapidly forward, ropes of saliva trailing from his mouth and now and then flecks of foam flying from his snapping jaws. His awful eyes seemed not to see her, yet just as he reached a line with her, he snapped and caught a mouthful of the voluminous petticoats propriety demanded should be worn at that time. But even so, Selina felt the pinch of his teeth and instinctively struck at him with the idiotic

little sunshade she carried. That was enough, the maddened creature backed his black body and crouched for the spring. Shrieks, oaths, cries rose about her—but she could not move! She knew the shop door had been thrown open for her shelter—but she stood and gazed and knew he would hurl himself at her throat; and was only conscious of a disgusted dread of the creature's hot, fetid breath! Then the black bulk sprang toward her—a big arm shot out above her shoulder and across her breast and fairly caught the mad creature by the throat. As two strong hands were clutching desperately at the heavy writhing shape, a voice cried sharply: "*Tournez la tête—vite!*"—then in English: "Turn your head away!" and sick and faint at the sight, Selina obeyed and leaned heavily against the shop-window until a cheer, a still black shape in the gutter and a big smiling man who pushed people from him with his elbows while he laughingly wiped his hands on a handkerchief told her that the incident was over, and that she had to thank this man for her life.

That had been the beginning—and the end? The woman wrung her hands hard and muttered: "The end, dear God! what will the end be and when will it be?" Her lips curled contemptuously at the memory of that swift courtship, of her own headlong love for the well-spoken, well-to-do, well-looking French Canadian, who had filled her heart with pride and

gratitude by his honorable proposals, all the more precious to her because she had so often been shamed and humiliated by proposals of the most meretricious nature. Swift courtship, reckless marriage, for even her employer would have inquired into the character and past of the man urging marriage upon his employee, had she asked him the service. But the thought never entered her mind, hence the almost unwitnessed marriage in the most obscure church findable.

Then for a year and a half the exquisite joy of a little home of her very own. If she shed tears upon her wedding day, it was because she had no mother to kiss and bless her, had not even a grave on which she might lay her bride's flowers in sign of remembrance. Eight months had not passed ere she had stumbled upon evidence of Charles Paul Lavalle's infidelity, but just as he had laughingly thrust aside with his great elbows the men who wished to congratulate him when he had strangled the mad dog, so he laughingly thrust aside her dismay, her grief, her anger.

The woman, an ex-beauty, having proved older than himself, he looked upon the affair as a huge joke with the laugh turned against him. After that he made no secret of his many flirtations; but she had no relatives to fly to, no gossiping confidante to magnify her trouble and sharpen her jealousy, so she accepted the situation, making the most of his amiable temper, his generous provision for her when he was in funds, and un-

complainingly stinting herself when he was out of them—until the day, the awful day, when sitting with her girl baby in her arms, the white little “May-blossom,” as Paul Lavallo adoringly called her, a woman had entered, without knock or ring of any kind, a woman half mad with passion, whose black eyes, jetty gray-threaded hair and almost swarthy skin told of her nationality before her imperfect English began to stumble forth in cursing, in awful imprecations, and a demand for her husband.

“Hers! Lucie Laballe! Hers hers! here then, infamous one! was the family she had robbed—*here!*” (and she thrust before Selina’s eyes a picture of Charles Lavallo, with three great boys about him, and this now raving woman at his side smiling tenderly at him.) “See them, harlot! see the certificate of marriage! to me—*myself!* Lucie le Bau—see you now!” (waving the paper. Then catching sight of the ring on Selina’s hand, she gave a shriek and spat upon it.) “Give him to me! that has had of the hunger for his face so long! Myself, have I worked—see the fingers!” (showing the needle pricks dried and hard), “and Jules, he has work too, for to live, while you! slut, you grow fat on white bread! Take off the ring; that lies! Give it me! Give! I say, or I’ll put in the heart *this!*”

She drew a small dagger from the bosom of her dress and sprang upon the ghastly, dead-silent Selina. Holding her by the shoulder, she raised the stiletto

high. As it descended the child's arm went about its mother's neck in an effort to lift itself up higher. Even the furious French wife tried to turn aside the blow, to spare the babe, but did not quite succeed. The blade caught the tiny white arm and the blood leaped out in quick response. Innocent blood that chilling the rage of one woman, set the other afire! Selina sprang to her feet, cast the babe on the bed and catching the intruder by her shoulders shook her back and forth as a puppy shakes a glove!

"Pray! pray!" she gasped, "that I don't kill you!" Suddenly she flung the woman from her, who crossed herself rapidly and looked anxiously toward the fallen dagger. "Take it!" cried Selina, contemptuously thrusting it toward her with her foot, "and take this too," catching up the daguerreotype of Charles Paul and hurling it to the floor. "And here is another certificate! Oh, look at it well! that you may know what kind of man you would have done murder for! Take him back but you will need to chain him close, for if he has any soul at all, it's centered in that milk-white baby girl there!" (the dark care-lined face contracted painfully at the words.) "Take him—he will laugh and tell you what a joke it's been! Take him—and when your head rests on his breast, say to yourself, 'this is my husband, who was given back to me by a harlot!' Now go! go quick! before I do you an in-

jury!" and she turned to the little May, and wiping the bleeding arm, prepared to bandage it.

And after that Selina's life had been—purgatory! The man followed her, cajoled, pleaded, threatened—at last promised the tormented woman peace, if she would give to him his "May-flower," his "blue-eyed, milk-white child!"

And Selina had replied, she would strangle her as he strangled the mad dog before she would place her under his influence; and so she changed her name often and fled from one city to another, to escape his persecutions. And the child feared him beyond death and the devil, and was taught one lie: "That she had no father!" If pressed, she was to say: "He was dead."

Then in Cleveland, Selina working in a boarding-house, had by chance heard a Western woman speak the name of Parsell, had heard from her that people of that name, who had left the Mormons, were settlers in Illinois, near Quincy. She rather thought they were at Lima. Selina greatly excited had told her story to the woman, who had kindly written to the post-master of Lima to make inquiries, and lo! the old mother was alive, was living with the baby-sister Kate, who was now Mrs. Jason Gallaway. And with the mother-craving stronger than ever, Selina, without consulting the few good friends whom she had won, in the double hope of seeing her beloved mother and of saving her child from Charles Paul Lavalley, had

taken every penny of her savings and had started on this journey, and only now realized that she was undertaking a step in the dark.

Suddenly a piercing cry of very rapture from May made Selina open her eyes and lean forward. The westering sun struck through a pink and pearly glory of fruit blossoms. "Oh!" she exclaimed, pleasure flushing her tired face, "how beautiful! peach and pear—I thought at first they were peach and cherry!"

"Humph!" thought the driver, "this hain't her first visit to the country. She knows trees all right enough. Whoa!" he cried, and then leaning far out, he called to a man in the yard: "Stranger! do yer know of airy a Gallaway livin' in these parts?"

The man spat, hitched up his galluses, and made answer: "Y-a-a-s, I know a plumb dozen of 'em. Which Gallaway mout yer be wantin'?"

"Jason," prompted Selina.

"Jason Gallaway," called the driver.

"Why'er," answered the man, "he lives in the next house yer com' to—right-hand side o' the road—barn opposite."

"Thank-ee!" said the driver—then to the weary, dusty horses: "Git up! oh, *will* yer now! Next on the right, eh?"

And Selina's heart gave a frightened jump, for in a few moments she would know to what her step in the dark had taken her.

CHAPTER III

A Dreadful Mistake

All watched for the house on the right, and in a few minutes a woman's voice was heard calling: "Suke! Suke!" and a cow bell clanked brassily in response. A young orchard of apples, just beginning to spray out into pinkish-white beauty was passed and then: "There it is!" cried May. "Such a funny, little squatty down house! See, Mama, the barn's twice as big and nice, and——"

"S-sh!" exclaimed her mother, with a glance whose severity was intensified by her own dismayed disappointment.

She had known well the life of the farmer, even of the settler in his cabin in a rough clearing, but never had she seen anything like this place and already her heart sank like a stone.

A short bit of a woman came from the house, her dress-skirt turned up around her and pinned in the back after the manner of an Irish scrub-woman, a milk pail in one hand and a three-legged stool in the other.

"Hallo!" called out the driver. "Mout this be the Gallaway place?"

"Yes," answered the woman sourly. "Why?"

Instead of replying, the driver jammed his whip into its socket and jumped down crying: "Here you be, mum! Now, for a jump Adelaide—Estelle—Sophonisbe—er May!" and he threw the child high in the air as he jumped her out of the conveyance. Then, as he briskly began to unstrap the trunk, Selina slowly descended. And suddenly the woman threw the pail one way, the stool another, and with a cry of "Sister!" rushed to the low rail fence and began climbing it.

But Selina, who at that word "Sister!" had burst into tears, flew to meet her, and poor little May stood covered with mortification at the sight of her mother standing on a second rail of the fence and kissing passionately again and again over its top, the cross, short woman, who already she did not like.

"Come in! come in!" said the woman.

Selina looked up and down for the gate and as she saw none, with flaming cheeks, she awkwardly clambered over. The driver dropped the trunk over the rails and then with laughter in his voice, showed May how to climb over, at which the hostess remarked, curtly: "I should think a girl as big as that could get over a fence alone."

And Selina swiftly replied: "She never saw a rail fence before, but she will require no further instruction—or if she does, I'll give it. Come here, May! This is your Aunt Catharine—or Aunt Kate,

perhaps she will let you call her?" and the new relation looked down with cold disapproval at the neatly shod feet and mittened hands; and as May offered her a timid greeting, she stooped and touched her cheek with chill pale lips—then rose and asked the driver: "If he wished to bait his horses—or put up, or what?"

"And he reckoned, he'd give 'em jest a sup of water, and then jog back tar the village, an' put up thar, ready for an early start back in the morning."

And May, watching the watering with eager eyes, was once more attracted by the strangeness of the vehicle. "Please, Mr. Driver," she whispered, "What's the name of that wag—er, carriage—er, whatever it is?"

"Wal, now, May, I dunno rightly what the darn'd thing *is* named. It's a sort of cross-breed—sired by a stage-coach out of er buck-board, an' half-brother to a surrey—I make it."

"I guess you're making fun," said May, reproachfully. "But it would have been bad if it had rained. We'd have got very wet with the sides all open like that."

"Oh, no!" answered the man, cheerfully, "the curtains keep the water out purty well. Yer see yer think that-a-way because this rig's shet when it's open," and with that astonishing statement on his lips he remounted to the front seat and calling a "good-bye!" slowly turned back toward the city, while Selina and the child wished from their souls they were

going with him. He had been the last link between them and civilization, it seemed to Selina, and now she was indeed forlornly alone.

Then the querulous voice of her sister said: "Why didn't yer let us know when ter expect yer—we'd have fixed up some, if we'd er known. Now you'll have ter take things jest as they happen ter be."

"But Mother?" pleaded Selina, with her hand on Catharine's arm, "Does she know?"

"No! she knows nuthin'!"

"You mean that she does not expect me?"

"I mean she doesn't know that we've heerd from yer at all."

"Why, Kate!" exclaimed Selina Marsh, reproach in every line of her face.

"Oh, wal!" Kate had a way of jerking out her words that was irritating in the extreme, indicating, as it did, habitual ill-temper. "Of course I'd hav' told her some time—or if you'd have given any notice of yer comin'—but now let's go in an' see if she'll know yer. You jest ask yer way—or if yer can rest awhile or somethin', as if yer war a stranger."

They turned toward the small, mean-looking frame house of one story that stood with its side to the front. Between the two windows a door led directly into the living-room. On the left as one entered was a bed. At its foot another window, and sitting beside it an old woman; and at sight of her May's heart gave a

startled jump. The face was like that of her mother carved in ivory. The regular, clear-cut features, the intense blue of the eyes, even that strange opaqueness that made them look like very blue china, were all repeated in this colorless face, enclosed in a pure white cap. The child knew she was utterly unlike her mother, and this marked likeness between the two women made her feel forlorn and lonely.

As they entered, Mrs. Gallaway brought forward a chair and Selina, who was trembling all over, sat down. The old woman, raising her eyes, just glanced at the strangers and resumed her knitting.

Selina wet her lips and with an effort asked: "Is it far from here to Lima?"

The knitting stopped—the knitter seemed not even to breathe. She was waiting for the stranger's next words.

They came: "Oh, is it so far as that?"

The old woman was on her feet, swaying unsteadily: "Little Selina!" she gasped; "that's my little Selina's voice!"

"Mother!" remonstrated Catharine.

But the aged woman tottered forward: "I have not heard her speak for twenty years—but I know the voice of my little girl! Are you——?"

"Mother! oh, Mother!" and even Catharine had the grace to step to the door and look outside for a moment or two, while mother and daughter clung to-

gether in speechless joy and pain. Then Selina motioned to May.

"Yours?" asked the old mother, and stooping, raised the child's face, looked long into her eyes and kissed her very gently and stroked her cheek. Then, as both discovered that she was lame, the sharp voice of Catharine said, "Better get back to your chair, Mother," and May saying, "May I help you, Grandma?" put the old woman's hand on her little shoulder and walked over to the hard cushionless chair—but as the shaken woman sank down, May gave, in spite of herself, an exclamation and glanced at her mother, who, following the child's eyes, turned first white then red, for Grandmother Parsell's feet were quite bare. The old woman, trying nervously to conceal them beneath her scanty linsey-woolsey skirt, examined her knitting closely as if seeking for a possible dropped stitch.

Selina turned with flashing eyes toward her sister, then of a sudden recalling the empty pocket-book she carried, she checked the indignant words on the edge of her lips; and Catharine, darting an angry glance at her mother, muttered with red-streaked cheeks some disconnected words, about "custom—not necessary—and coming all unannounced," and finally requested Selina to take off her things and the "young-un's—er—the child's."

And Selina replied in a chilly tone: "The young-one is called May—a name so brief and simple that people

rarely find it difficult to remember." Then as she removed her bonnet, and at a sign from Catharine placed it on the foot of the bed, she asked while relieving May of hat and small jacket: "Where are your children, Kate—not at school on Saturday, of course?"

"School?" cried the woman. "Where do you think you are, Selina? There's no school in these parts, 'cept in the winter, when the boys can be spared from the farms. We *work* here" (with a condemning glance at the cheap but modishly made dress of her sister, who wondered amusedly what *she* had ever done but work). "The children would be home with their father and the hired man very soon now, from a day in the corn."

"Why!" exclaimed Selina Marsh, with bright interested eyes: "Is it not early for corn planting?"

Grandma Parsell looked up with a pleased smile, and Kate rather grudgingly laughed and answered: "You haven't quite forgotten farm life then, in spite of yer city clothes and ways?"

"No," replied Selina, "I've not forgotten it though I've not closed my hand on the udders of a cow or smelled the earth in a freshly turned furrow for over twelve years—and I thought it a trifle early for corn-dropping, as this hot day must be exceptional."

"Yes," said Kate, "but this is a special field—extra well drained, an' that was fall plowed too, and—oh, well! Hulda's Brat said he'd heard, yes, and seen the

whippoorwill—the rest o' us haven't—but he's allays peeritin' round and seein' everything ahead of every one else! But all the world must know that the whippoorwill's comin' means real settled spring, an' that he says, 'Drop-her-in! drop-her-in!' as plain as he can. So soon's the Brat told him, Jason he harnessed up and the hull crowd drov' down toward the 'bot-toms' ter get that one field inter corn. An' now, Selina, I'll hav' ter get supper ready, for the men folks can't be kept waitin' for their feed," and straightway she withdrew to a small kitchen that, with a short-waisted bit of a porch, had been roughly added to the end of the house.

Opening off from the living-room were two inconceivably small bedrooms, barely holding a bed and one chair. No table, no bureau, and that was all. Yet this building was supposed to shelter Mr. and Mrs. Gallaway, their three children, Grandmother Parsell, Selina Marsh and her child May, and the hired man. And Selina could not help thinking that if all found beds under this roof, the sardine packers might get points here in the art of close packing.

Suddenly there came the barking of a dog and then the sound of wheels and laughter, and Kate, who became Catharine to all when in her tempers, hurried out and evidently gave the news. Then she brought in her brood and presented them. Her oldest son, Will, was a big manly lad of ten years; for Kate had mar-

ried when a mere child, not yet fifteen, but now, though younger than her sister Selina, she looked years older. Next came a girl, Melissa, aged nine, black-eyed, raven-haired, white-toothed, a pretty gypsyish thing; and the youngest boy, Jack, a true Parsell, fair-skinned, blue-eyed, well-featured. They were shy and awkward and when May gravely offered her hand, each dropped it as if it were a hot potato. Jack snickered outright and his mother angrily pushed him out on the porch, where she was heard to denounce him for letting some one outdo him in manners.

Then came Jason Gallaway, and Selina was conscious of a moment's sharp anxiety. There entered a big, piratical-looking man, with jet black hair, small bright black eyes, a great square black beard resting on his broad breast, gold earrings in his ears, a voice of rumbling thunder, a hand like a smoked ham and the broad kindly smile of a pleased but bashful child. There was no discounting the heartiness of his somewhat embarrassed greeting. He called the newcomer Selina and gave May a couple of friendly thumps on the back, that nearly knocked the breath out of her body, while filling her little heart with gratitude. Then addressing Grandmother Parsell, he boomed out the inquiry: "This hot day bad for yer leg, mother?" and she nodded her head and answered: "Very bad, Jay."

"Why," anxiously asked Selina, "what is it that you suffer from, dear? Rheumatism? no—" (with a slight laugh) "not gout?"

"She's got—" began Jason, when the fragile-looking woman said piteously: "Not now, Jay—please don't talk about it now!"

At that moment the wrinkled forehead, red eyes and undershot jaw of the fierce-looking old watch-dog appeared at the door. He looked in wistfully and wagged a half-mast tail deprecatingly, and May's cry of joy as she ran towards him was crossed by the warning roar of Jason: "Take care, honey! don't tech him, he bites!"

And May on her knees, with arms about the brute's powerful neck, turned and asked, "Please, sir, did you speak to me?" at which every one began to laugh.

"Wal, I reckon my speakin' didn't do much good," and then as Watch settled back on his hindquarters and with serious determination set to work to thoroughly clean up May's unresisting countenance, Jason Gallaway exclaimed: "Wal, doggone my skin, if she ha'in't got a nerve!"

"Oh," replied Selina, easily, "dogs know their friends and May has no fear of them," and suddenly shivered as she seemed to see the smiling big man with the dead dog at his feet. "Is—is *that* the reason she is not afraid?" she asked herself, angrily.

"Please, sir," began the child, whom the man interrupted with: "Hasn't yer mar telled you I'm yer uncle, May?"

"No, sir," she answered,

"Wal, I be! I'm yer Uncle Jay—what do yer think of that?" he asked with a sort of lumbering levity, and May, having studied his swarthy good-natured face a moment, carefully wiped her lips on her small handkerchief and answered: "I think if you would not mind much I'd like to kiss you, Uncle Jay."

With a very roar of laughter he bent to receive the caress, when the shocked, even terrified voice of Selina, who had returned to Grandma Parsell, cried out: "Cancer? Oh, Mother! Mother!"

The face of Jason contracted, and the child frightened by her mother's voice, whispered anxiously: "What's that, Uncle? What's cancer? Is it something bad?"

And he answered: "Y-a-a-s, honey, I 'low it's purty doggoned, dam'd bad—too bad for a little gal like you ter know 'bout. I wouldn't let on, if I was you, that I'd a-heerd anythin' 'bout it."

"No, sir," May answered, "but is it alive—c-can it bite?"

The big man shivered and answered: "Yes—that's jes' 'bout what it does do—but don't you say nothin' more now, honey!"

And again May answered: "No, sir"—but for weeks she kept a sharp lookout for that mysterious something, that was bad and could bite and was called cancer. And when one day, later on, she came by chance face to face with it, in a very agony of terror and pity,

she was carried speechless and quivering in every nerve, to bed, while her mother, stealing an hour from work, sat at her side and told a fairy story and followed it with the lugubrious ballad of "Mary of the Wild Moor"—which, given in its entirety, was bound to produce sleep or insanity—and May finally slept.

But that first day, her promise had no sooner been given, than Aunt Catharine (it was odd how quickly the child had settled upon the more formal name for her own use), had entered the room to set the table.

"Let me help you," said Selina, and she followed her sister into the kitchen, returning with some heavy common stone-ware, such as one finds at depot lunch counters, black-handled knives and forks, and as Kate went to the tiny cellar for some butter, Selina searched high and low, and then called out: "Where are the napkins? I can't find——"

"Sh-sh-sh!" and again, "S-h-sh!" warned Grandma, "For heaven's sake, Selina, hush! She will go into a rage if she hears you. There never was a napkin in the house! Oh, be careful, Selina! or——"

She stopped suddenly as Kate came in with the butter: "What were you hollerin' about?" she asked her sister.

"Oh, nothing," answered the unfortunate Selina. "I was only looking for the table coffee-pot—and I couldn't find it." Grandma groaned.

"Table coffee-pot!" snapped Kate, "we're very

glad ter get coffee outen the tin boiler it's made in, without any table-pot!"

"Oh, the coffee will taste just as good," was the conciliating answer of Selina. But, alas, no sooner had Kate's face begun to clear at it, than Jason put in:

"Wal, I dunno! Mrs. Kincaid at Quincy allers pours her coffee and tea, too, inter a right purty table-pot an' it looks plumb nice. Kate, you'd orter'er let me got yer one at the last fair."

He got no further. One pale, phosphorescent glance from her eyes silenced not only Jason but every one else in the room, and after a deadly pause the meal was thumped upon the table, chairs jerked into place and finally Selina remarked she thought, as they were crowded, May had better wait for the second table.

"Oh, no!" interrupted the unhappy Jason, "let her scrooge up here, right 'tween 'Lonzo and me, and——"

"She'll sit between Mother and Selina!" angrily declared Kate. "You'd better be lookin' out for yer own, Jason Gallaway!"

And 'Lonzo, the hired man, who may have had another name, but who kept the guilty secret buried in his own breast if he had, gently hummed a few bars of "Home, Sweet Home," as he drew out his chair. Selina raised her glance quickly to his face, when with the eye furthest from Kate he solemnly winked at the stranger. Overwhelmed, not knowing where to turn or look, Selina sharply exclaimed: "You, May!"

The child who had heard, seen and understood perfectly, gasped: "Yes, ma'am!" and looked at her mother with a face quivering with such suppressed laughter that tears rose in her eyes, while Grandma's foot softly, warningly touched her under the table. And thus, between choked-back laughter, ill-restrained fury and nervous fright, the entire Parsell family were on the verge of hysterics.

May being completely worn out with fatigue and excitement, and her mother not much better, neither offered any objection to the surprisingly early hour named for retirement for the night. By the aid of a dwarfed and consciously inadequate oil lamp, May made the acquaintance of the first truckle, or, as they preferred to call it, "trundle-bed," she had ever seen; and Selina privately accused herself of stupidity that she had not thought of that before. Here then were four beds. Still she was at a loss to understand how things were to be arranged.

Uncle Jason's voice rumbled out a summons to the boys, from the bit of porch where he sat smoking his corn-cob pipe. "You boys! ha'in't yer got no manners at all? Com' erlong out here and give' the women-folks the place for awhile!"

Sitting in a dark corner, Selina took May on her lap and began unlacing her gaiters. The child's lips were moving rapidly and she seemed to be counting her fingers again and again. Pausing a moment, she

whispered: "Do you know where we are going to sleep, Mama?"

"No—not yet. But what are you doing?"

"Oh," answered May, "I'm just trying to fix us all for sleeping—by the 'rithmetic way. You see, Mama, there's nine of us, and on my fingers even, four beds go into nine people two times and one person over and Mama, you always say I'm not lucky, and—I—I'm so afraid I'll be the one over! Please Mama, keep me with you—I won't crowd!"

The first arrangement had been: the big bed in the corner for Mr. and Mrs. Gallaway, the truckle-bed for Melissa and May, Grandma and Selina in one bedroom, and 'Lonzo and the boys in the other. But alas, the two quick smiles, the two eager glances exchanged by long-parted mother and daughter were noted, and the plan instantly shattered.

"No!" sharply dictated Catharine Gallaway. "That won't do. I can't have Mother hurt!"

"I'm a very quiet sleeper, Kate—I'm sure I shall not touch Mother's leg—and I should lie on her right side."

"Why, Kate," timidly protested Grandma Parsell, "I've slept with the children, and no one ever hurt me but Jack, a little, he kicks so—but Selina was always so quiet."

"Oh, yes!" jerked out the termagant. "My children have all the faults—other people's all the vir-

tues! But I'll try to prevent any further injury to you by any one berlonging to *me*. We are crowded, of course, but *you* can have a room to yerself—then you can't very well complain!"

Slow tears gathered in the old eyes, but no word came from her trembling lips. The disappointment was a bitter one. The sarcastic words wounded deeply. The physical pain she endured amounted to torture. Oh, what joy it would have been to have passed those quiet hours of the night in the arms of her long-lost daughter, telling her with kisses and tears how guiltless she was of abandoning her. Now she was limping silently to her room, when May touched her hand and said: "Please, Grandmother, won't you kiss me good night?" As the old woman bent down to her, the child put her arms about her neck and whispered, very low: "We love you awful hard, Grandma—Mother and me!" and a smile quivered about her lips a moment as she whispered back: "God bless you both!" and disappeared.

Then the dictatorial Catharine directed that Selina, Melissa and May should have one bed, and 'Lonzo and the boys the other.

Both Catharine and little Melissa shed their garments after the manner of moulting hens shedding theirs—wherever they happened to drop, where they remained till morning. When Catharine had got her dumpy little form into a scanty night dress, meaning

to turn the light lower, she accidentally turned it higher betraying May in a far corner saying the simple old "Now I lay me down to sleep"; and with a jerk of the shoulder and a contemptuous curl of the lip, she exclaimed: "Well! what next? I 'spose there'll be bobbings and crossings pretty soon—but we don't have any truck with Catholics here. I reckon you are—"

Selina's temper was straining hard at the leash as she sharply interrupted: "The child is saying the prayer you were taught to say at Mother's knee with the rest of us children, and I am now" (viciously) "what you were before you became a Mormon—a Methodist!"

Kate's face crimsoned at her sister's fling, but Jason coughing very loud, was crossing the porch and Selina hastily retired with the little girls. As the farmer stumbled through the dark toward the bed, he surprisedly said: "Why, Kate, wouldn't it 'er been better for Selina ter have bunked in with Mother? She'll be mighty crowded down thar, three in a bed."

"We're all crowded in this house! It's no worse for Selina, I reckon, than for any one else! It's no fault of mine if she's crowded! I didn't build the house and I ain't to be jawed by any Gallaway alive! Crowded? huh!"

And Selina Parsell Marsh, with her child's arm about her neck, too tired to sleep, said to herself, as she stared into the dense darkness: "Dear God! but I have made a dreadful mistake!"

CHAPTER IV

The Brat

Nothing is more surprising to the city man or woman than the rapidity with which news travels in sparsely settled country places. Selina Parsell Marsh was fairly amazed at the widespread knowledge of her arrival at the Gallaway farm. She had paid no heed to the few moments' talk that the driver had had with an old woman from whom he had asked a cup of milk for May—yet a half-hour later a tin-peddler, while haggling over the price of a milk-strainer, had heard from her all the driver could tell and, as he turned there from the direct road and crossed the country by lanes, he left at every farm-house or log-cabin the news of the widow from the East, who was going to Jason Gallaway's, while the well-mounted man who had spoken for a minute with the Quincy driver as he lengthened a check-rein on his off horse, being a tax-collector, was glad indeed of some bit of news with which to brighten his somewhat unwelcome calls. Nor had the old man, who hitched up his galluses while directing them to the "next house, right side of the road," suggested by his appearance the swift purveyor of news that he was. Thus a surprising num-

ber of widely separated neighbors had heard of the "widder" out from the East that "mout mos' like be the sister Kate Gallaway had 'rit twic't to, as the postmaster said over to Marceline, and they 'lowed they'd jes' pack over and look at her!"

Their decision alone would have made a trying day for Selina and Kate, but, add to that the fact that early in the week it had become known clear down to "the Bottoms" that Jay Gallaway's new threshing-machine had arrived and was set up and all ready for the season's work, that it was the first one brought to the settlement, and it followed naturally that every farming male creature who owned or could "borry a beast," straddled it and "packed up or down or over" to Jay Gallaway's to see the new machine. And, as Kate wiped her brow and cooked and cooked and Selina washed up and reset the table, the former remarked resentfully: "That it seemed like the whole doggorned county had piled onter her for grub and drink, while they grinned and ducked at Selina and spit and smoked around that machine!"

To Selina the day was one of mortification, disappointment and surprise, amounting to amazement. Directly after she had cleared away all traces of the breakfast, leaving Kate free to attend to other matters, she had freshly washed, brushed and braided May, and, getting her into her Sunday shoes and a long white apron, had given her leave to walk up and

down in the lane. She then plaited her own long hair, in the broad "basket pattern" she only affected on Sundays, and donning her carefully brushed traveling-dress and a black silk apron, came forth from the tiny room and seemingly blighted the entire Gallaway family. With open eyes and mouths, they stared with unwinking, bovine astonishment. 'Lonzo, who made the most of his toilet in public, shaving himself by the open front door, slowly strapped his razor on the palm of his hand and remarked, reflectively: "And she was turned inter a pillar of salt—poor thing! I suppose she jest glanced back Sodom-wise as she ran and saw a neighbor, perhaps, escaping in her *Sunday* sandals, an' she was jest turned inter salt at ther sight. See ther awful effect of Sunday clothes, children. I tell yer what, ther Bible's a plumb live book, don't yer think so yerself, Mrs. Marsh?" This respectful mode of address was always used with the amiable intention of aggravating his employer's wife.

"I think the Bible is not to be laughed at," replied Selina, severely.

"That so?" asked 'Lonzo, in a nasal tone caused by pulling his nose to the left side as he shaved his right cheek. "Why, ter me," he added, as he wiped his razor on a plantain leaf, "that Book's fuller of fun than an egg's full of meat. Joe Miller's joke book's sad to tears by ther side of it. The Old Testament, I mean—the New One's kind of by itself. But them

gumdasted old Jewish Tribes did jes' tech each other up and some of their towns kep' open all night, I reckon, for Sodom was—"

"'Lonzo,'" rumbled Jason; while Grandma quavered: "Why, 'Lonzo! what on earth possesses you to-day?"

Then Jason exclaimed, after a long-drawn breath: "Selina, you do look plumb nice, but w-what fur—you ain't going to light out, be yer?"

Selina looked puzzled. "No," interposed Grandma, "she is not going any place."

"Then why?" began Jason, when Selina exclaimed, "Why, is it not Sunday, does not every one in the world make a little change on Sunday?"

"Look at me, I do!" broke in 'Lonzo, waving a bar of brown soap. "Gallaway, you know, and yer wife and yer wife's children know, that 'six days shalt thou plow and wash with soft soap out of ther iron kittle, but the seventh day, shalt thou use bar-soap and sit on ther fence and'—Oh, here comes John Parsell!"

"My boy!" softly exclaimed Grandma, smiling all over her pallid face.

Jason rose with a hearty: "Wal, I'm plumb glad ter see John here ag'in. He's com' for you, Selina, of course!"

The children made a rush out to meet the coming man, as Jason continued: "I hope Kate'll let things

rest now"; then lowering his voice, he explained to Selina, who waited with trembling expectancy the coming of a brother, last seen twenty years before, "Kate's hard on his wife, our Jane, and of course that's kinder hard on me, too."

"On you?" repeated Selina, "I don't just understand."

"Why, John's wife's my sister, Rose Gallaway as was."

"Good gracious!" said she, "I didn't know that."

"Yes, and Kate can't abide Rose, who's a good woman, but a bit particular 'bout her housework and that—a—like; and Kate's treated her so that John, he up and spoke right out—an' Kate don't never overlook anythin' like that; and Mother here ain't been 'lowed ter see or speak ter John for two year or more. And 'er—s-s-h!"

Kate came in hurriedly, looking excited and not displeased, when Selina's hair and dress caught her attention: "What's all that for?" she snapped. "I dunno that John Parsell's any better'n the rest of us, that all this fuss is made for him! You might find better use for yer finery than wearin' it out for jest yer brother!"

"Good heaven and earth!" cried the tormented woman, "don't you brush your hair or change your dress for Sunday, or have you forgotten what day it is?" Then, with a tremulous laugh, she suddenly

asked: "Can't you remember, Kate, how Mother used to allow me to tie your little pink shoulder bows for you on Sundays? You looked so sweet in white and pink."

The woman's temper softened slightly, she smiled and later, when Selina had released herself from the bear-like hug of her very own brother, Kate held out her hand and said "Howdy, John? Children and Rose well? Sit down over thar by Mother."

And then puffing and blowing like a young porpoise, May, with flushed, happy face, came in carrying something in the crown of her hat, crying: "Oh, Mama! see what I've found right out by the very road in the grass."

Suddenly she saw John Parsell and stopped. She gazed from him to her mother, and then back again: "May, this is your Uncle John, Mama's brother."

John Parsell's ready and gentle smile brought her to his knee and they kissed and were friends. But still she stared. "What's the matter?" asked her mother.

"Why, it's so funny!" answered May. "Uncle John looks just like you, Mama, dressed in man's clothes!" and every one laughed, for surely no three people were ever before so startlingly alike as were this mother, son and daughter. It was almost uncanny.

"Whatever did yer find in the grass?" asked John Parsell.

"Oh, for-true, real violets!" answered May. "And I picked and picked! all these! And there's for you, Mama—and there's for you Grandma," as she handed little bunches of the delicate blossoms, tied with bits of grass, and the women, smiling, pinned them on their gowns, and May ran to the porch to give a third bunch to her Aunt Catharine.

John Parsell put his arms about Selina and kissed her again, then he turned and asked: "Mother, has Hulda's Brat been here lately? Rose wants some blood-root worst way, an' I'm blest if I know whar ter look for it! It would save time ter find him—for I don't believe he can be stumped as ter the wharabouts of any growin' thing in field or pastur'!"

A shout of laughter from the children broke in on his words, and May came, very quietly, to her mother's knee. But her lips trembled and two big tears stood in her eyes.

"What is it?" whispered Grandma.

The child smiled faintly: "Nothing much, thank you, ma'am," she answered.

"What did you do?" sharply asked Selina.

"I—why, Mama, I just gave Aunt Catharine the violets and a pin to fasten them with, and—and she throwed them away in the pig's tub, and they—they did all laugh at me, because I gathered them and said I acted just like Hulda's Brat!"

Grandma sighed heavily and patted the hand of

the grieved and wounded child, while Selina asked: "For mercy's sake, are children allowed to call each other such names as that?"

And John and his mother exchanged looks of amused surprise, but before he could point out Selina's error, a glance from the window made him cry:

"Good Lord! Mother, just look out! here comes the Calvin Toler crowd, horse, foot and dragoons!"

A cry of "Hallo!" from outside was answered by hearty "How-dys," and "Won't yer 'light?" and Selina drawn to the window saw the first of a bewildering number of arrivals.

The absence of a gate seemed not to trouble these Sunday visitors. A weary horse stood close to the fence and on his back were three people. One by one, boy, woman and man alighted and entered the place by simply stepping from the horse's back to the fence's top, and then jumping down inside. And after the woman, quite unassisted, gracefully rose on all fours from *her* jump, the party came toward the house. Their clothes, or rather the lack of them, made Selina send up a startled cry to heaven! Man, woman and boy were barefooted. The man wore a hickory shirt (a blue and white striped material, harsh as hair-cloth, and strong as iron), butternut trousers, with a mass of burrs clinging to their hems, and an enormous home-plaited straw hat, that was his complete costume. His wife, not ill-looking in the face,

was a corsetless, shapeless bean-pole figure hung with an indigo-blue and orange calico; a white cotton handkerchief pinned around her neck with a palpably brass breast-pin, and that nightmare horror, a "slat" sun-bonnet. The boy repeated the father's costume, minus half the seat of the trousers, Watch having thus settled an old grudge against young Hy Toler. And the blazing red had not yet died out of Selina Marsh's face, when an old woman, her daughter behind her and her little girl grandchild in her arms, all on one old gray mare, with a nickering young foal following, came ambling up to the fence, and 'Lonzo, going forth to put up "the beast," remarked to John Parsell: "Here's five ladies, all in a bunch; looks like Gallaway was givin' a dance."

The old woman had just got her pipe lighted, while her daughter sat down on the doorstep to nurse her baby, publicity evidently having no terrors for her, when a wagon-load of people from "the Bottoms" unloaded out at the barn. Every one came to see Kate Gallaway's sister from the East, and Selina was introduced to Tolers and Tolers, Cals and Tims and Hys and Almiras and Rhodas, and to Gallaways to the number of seven; and, at last holding her head, she muttered to her mother: "This whole settlement seems composed of Tolers and Gallaways"; "and Parsells," slyly put in Grandma. Then leaning for-

ward, she glanced out and cried: "Why, here comes Wash Gallaway; where's Jason?"

"Another?" gasped Selina, and then fell a prey to the younger women, who counted the breadths in her skirt, measured her apron by finger-lengths, asked if it was "new silk got 'er purpose," or if "'twas a piece outen summin' else?" and even pulled open her braids to count for themselves the number of strands in them.

It was awful. Kate fried chickens and baked biscuit and made coffee—but no sooner were people seated than new arrivals appeared. Selina put on a check apron and cleared up and washed dishes and reset the table and unconsciously made a favorable impression on the visitors by her deftness and quickness. "Looks mighty citified," said Wash Gallaway, "but she's light on her feet as a young filly and she can hist a meal on and off a table quicker'n lightning!"

"Didn't I tell yer she was a widder?" said 'Lonzo. "She's had lots of experience firrin' things."

Every one went out to look at the wonderful machine. Then the men would sit on top of the fences and talk it over; and the air would be full of broken sentences, about "them revolvin' rollers an' beaters, yer know," and why the rejected straw "is drawed 'round, don't yer see, this a-way and the grains cleaned of chaff, etc."

Selina was standing a moment on the porch with her brother, when one of the children called: "Uncle

John, hurry up if yer want Hulda's Brat, he's er talkin' ter Dad 'bout the thrashin'-machine."

Parsell ran off at once and a few minutes later Jay Gallaway came in and asked Kate and Selina to come out and look at the machine. He was swelling with pride in it and Selina went to please him, Kate was cross and tired and wouldn't go. No sooner had Selina reached the barn than Jack yelled: "Dad! oh Dad! bay Billy's loose and goin' off down ther road!" and Jason with a roar was off after the horse.

Several men were standing about the big machine and as she halted uncertain what to do, some ~~one~~ laughed a short, low, contemptuous laugh. The tone was so unlike anything she had heard that day, that Selina stood still in surprise. Then the voice said: "Well, since you ask me, why, you've told him exactly wrong, Cal Toler. The straw is ejected here. Oh, please excuse me!"

The speaker had come around the machine suddenly and faced Selina. A tanned, young giant, who in taking off his hat, which he turned uneasily between his hands, exposed a strip of milk-white forehead above the tan. A head covered with a thick cap-like growth of close-clipped yellow-brown hair. The brows were heavy, almost straight, and gave a somewhat lowering look to the steady, gray-blue eyes beneath them. The jaw was square, the chin protruding as if it were being purposely thrust out. The lips closed lightly

upon each other their whole length, but the line thus formed was beautiful. There was an embarrassed pause.

"I—I think I'd better go back," said Selina. "Brother Jason wanted to show me the thrasher, but—"

"Perhaps I will do?" interrupted the young man. "This is where a man stands to feed the wheat in," and he proceeded to explain the action of the machine, while the other men slowly withdrew.

"Oh!" sighed Selina, "I'd rather see the old-fashioned flail at work! But I suppose that's gone out now and the scythe and the sickle will follow."

He turned bright eyes upon her and answered: "We use the flail yet. that is" (a heavy frown coming to his brow) "Grandfather uses the flail. Perhaps you'd like to come over and see the grain beaten out on the barn-floor in the wasteful old way?"

"Oh, I would, if I'm here in the fall. Do you live near here?"

His face flushed all over: "Ex—excuse me," he stammered. "I guess you don't know us?"

Selina laughed, "Well, you're not a Toler, at any rate."

"My Grandfather is!" he snapped.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" exclaimed Selina, confusedly.

"No need! my name's not Toler, thank God! You're

Mrs. Marsh, I know, and I'm Eldred or Dred Hollister. I'll lay my life though, you've never heard the name?"

"N-no," answered Selina, unwillingly.

"No, I thought not!" he said with the low contemptuous laugh she remembered.

"But it's safe to bet you've heard of Hulda's Brat?"

"Yes, poor child!" she replied, sadly.

"Poor *child!*" he repeated and stared at her a moment, then added: "Why, Mrs. Marsh, Hulda's my mother, and *I'm* the Brat!"

CHAPTER V

The Wonder Man

Making a short cut by following a blazed track through the woods, a pretty bay filly with black pints and a dark dapple over side and rump, that always suggested the shadows of young leaves, came stepping daintily over exposed roots and carrying lightly her mistress and owner, Miss Amabel Stanway, the only daughter of the "big man" of the surrounding country, Robert Stanway, and, by the grace of God, the loveliest creature in all Adams County. Though unspoiled by adulation, warm-hearted and generous, it must be owned of her that she was

"A virgin purest lipped, yet in the lore
Of love, deep learned to the red heart's core."

In her very babyhood she had coquetted with her father's lawyer and physician—coily smiling, slowly lifting and lowering the silky lashes that curtained the dark glory of her eyes with all the skill of the trained coquette—made sweetly ludicrous by baby innocence.

She had no very superior intelligence. She had nothing of the fierce instincts of the huntress of men

—only she was beautiful and she frankly enjoyed her own fairness and understood instinctively the pretty comedy of playing at love.

She could feel the presence of a new admirer as other people felt the presence of approaching rain, and, being ignorant of what lies beneath the admiration of some men, was perhaps a trifle reckless in the encouragement she gave. So her father had once warningly told her mother, but Mrs. Stanway could not bear, she said, "to sully Amabel's girlish ignorance. Surely they could always guard their daughter, without such explanations and warnings!" Ah, yes! "girlish ignorance!" A fair thing unquestionably—yet from it has sprung how many tragedies!

Coming out of the wood, the horse made a scramble upward to reach the level of the road, and then, with a startled cry and a wild catching at the animal's mane, Amabel exclaimed "Stop, Firefly! Mercy! *will* you stop! Oh, whoa, then, if you can't understand anything but whoa! Well, that was a narrow escape from a tumble! Oh, Fly! Fly! what am I to do on this lonely road with a turned saddle?"

In vain she flung herself to the right; pulling at pommel or mane, she could not right the saddle. "It's all your fault, Fly!" she cried, giving the surprised bay a vicious little smack on the shoulder, "Just because a new man saddled you this morning, you came your old trick of swelling yourself out to secure an

easy girth. Now see what you've done! I wonder if I can tighten the straps myself. Well, I'll try!" and down she slipped to the ground. But in vain—she tugged and pulled, cutting her fingers with buckle and strap and reddening her face and neck with the strain. She could not bring the buckle up another hole, let alone the two that she wished, and a very vexed young woman she was; not at all relishing the prospect of walking a mile or more on the dusty high-road, leading a horse with one hand and carrying a few feet of riding-skirt in the other.

"Next time father wants me to carry messages for him he must see to the saddling of Fly himself! Oh, I am tired already! I hate walking!" Then recalling certain interminable strolls, she added, smiling "At least alone!"

Stopping to rest, she thought she heard a distant whistle. Fly pricked up her delicate ears, expelling the air from her nostrils noisily, as a dog broke through the brush and dashed across the road.

"Oh!" cried Amabel, "that's Shot! Eldred must be about somewhere! He would help me!" By the aid of her stirrup as a high step she reached the top of a great stump, and putting her hands to her mouth, halloed, long and loud, and was gladdened by an answering shout. Again she called, and presently out from the wood, running easily, lightly as on a cinder path, came

young Hollister. "Oh!" she thought, resentfully, "the idea of calling a man like that anybody's Brat!"

Vaulting over the fence, he stood looking up at her and surely, if ever eyes have kissed, blue eyes kissed brown in that long world-forgetting gaze. Then, as if waking from a dream, he asked: "What is it, Amabel? What has happened?"

"Oh, nothing romantic or interesting—only commonplace or ludicrous mishaps come my way—and Dred, I do so long to be romantic!"

"Do you?" he asked, then with a smile lighting his somewhat somber countenance:

"What would strike you as about the right thing in that line?"

"Why, a forced marriage to—oh, well, to anybody handy! To save my family from—er—most anything! Or say, an elopement by moonlight—or——"

"The dark of the moon," interrupted Eldred, "would be safer for an elopement! But, it seems to me, being romantic would make you pretty uncomfortable."

"Oh, of course!" replied Amabel, lightly, "you can't expect to have romance without trouble!"

"No, but you can have loads of trouble without one touch of romance!" put in Dred, rather grimly. "But you have not told me yet——"

"Well, you interrupt me so often, I can't explain," shamelessly asserted the girl. "You see, the saddle

turned on Firefly and came near spilling me on the road like a paper of peanuts."

A moment more and with tightened girths Firefly awaited her mistress, and the young man, holding his strong arms up to her, said: "Let me lift you, Amabel. You may hurt an ankle in jumping down," and so placed her in the saddle and walking at her side while the wild-rose flush that had risen in her cheeks slowly cooled, he asked: "Who saddled Fly for you this morning? He ought to have a good trouncing for his criminal carelessness, whoever he is! Had the horse been excitable or disobedient the result might have been—" He glanced at the beautiful face and words failed him.

But she heard the ugly grating of his tightly clenched teeth. Quickly she passed her hand downward over his face: "Don't!" she said, "don't look like that! you're not far from one of those silent rages that frighten me more than any number of profane threats."

"I'm sorry to frighten you, Miss Amabel, but you will admit it would ill become one whose own grandfather refers to him as a 'beggarly, burdensome brat' to indulge in any other rage than a silent one."

"Poor Eldred!" murmured Amabel.

The young fellow shrank as if the words had been blows, then went on sullenly, "But sometimes it happens that while all the nobly bred dogs are growling, barking and baying their threats, the silent cur bites—bites deep!"

"But Eldred," warned the girl, "think what happens then!"

"Oh, yes! I know, dogs and people both fall upon the cur, but they can't deprive him of the joy of that deep bite! So he can well afford to die for it!"

"Poor boy!" she said again, and again he shrank and flushed angrily. "Eldred, things must have been extra bad at hom—, at your Grandfather Toler's, for you to be so bitter and so ready to fall into anger even with me—just because I feel sorry and say 'poor boy!' How often do you suppose your idol—your 'wonder man'—had those words applied to *him?*"

"What?" Eldred's hat was pushed back that he might stare the harder. "Can you believe a John Keats was ever 'poor fellowed' by a Fanny Brawn?"

"Full many a time!" came positively from curling, contemptuous lips.

"But—but," argued Dred, piteously, "he loved her so, he worshiped her!"

"And," interrupted Amabel, "could not afford to marry her."

"But he was such a 'wonder man'—he had such thoughts, and—and such words to tell them in! He was so great!"

"But his greatness did not mean money, then—and Miss Brawn did. And so he had to go back to making pills and plasters, that he might the sooner put his handsome young head into the noose, and set his

friends to crying, 'Poor John Keats! he has married that Brawn creature and he'll never write another sonnet worth a——' "

"Oh, don't, Amabel!"

"I'm not making fun of the poet, Dred! But I do so hate that woman!"

"Was she not very beautiful?" asked the man.

"No! she was commonplace outside and downright vulgar inside, I believe!"

Dred's jaw squared itself, "I'm glad he died," he said, savagely, "died before he saw her stripped of all the lovely fancies he had wrapped her in. To call that 'wonder man,' poor Keats!"

"Perhaps I am misleading you," hastily put in Amabel—"but here you can take the book and read it for yourself." As she felt for the pocket in her full riding skirt, she did not see the scorching red that flamed up over the young fellow's face—for poor boy, it was his shame that he could not read.

Now, he hastily pressed back the shabby little brown book held out to him, saying: "You know the fate of anything I take into Grandfather Toler's house; but," eagerly, "Amabel, won't you read it to me again—that loveliest story of all? It's short, you know."

"But," hesitated the girl, "I was sent by father with messages."

"Can't I take them for you? who did he send you to?"

"Well, to Grandam Gallaway for one person."

"She's not a mile away, and the other one? who is the other person he sent you to?"

There was a slight lift to the slender sickle of her black brows and she shot at him a lustrous glance through her heavy lashes that made the breath catch in his throat. A dimple quavered uncertainly between her cheek and the corner of her berry-red lips, as she roughly answered: "You, his second message was to *you*."

He stopped the horse and clasping his hands upon the pommel of the saddle, lifted commandingly pleading blue-gray eyes, "Come!" he entreated, "just a little way down toward the creek; there is a perfect sea of fern, that is already opened out and is so tall"—(measuring). "The place is beautiful and quiet and you will look there in your green habit like—like that sweetheart of Robin Hood's—Mother used to tell me of, after Grandfather was asleep of nights. Please, beloved——!" he stopped, overcome by his own temerity.

But the girl's calm face convincing him she had not heeded the presuming term, he repeated: "Come! and set free in these woods, the 'wonder man's' lovely thoughts," and so led Firefly aside from the road and into the woods, and by and by the girl was sitting on a mossy log, the old brown book open upon her knee, the strong young giant stretched at length upon the ground, with elbow and palm supported

head, while listening with eye, ear, heart and soul, as one unconscious of his very breath. Listening, until he felt himself to be the burning *Porphyro* and saw his *Madeline* in the lovely down-bent face above him. His heart beat with great hurried throbs, when the flying lovers:

—“glide like phantoms into the wide hall—
Like phantoms in the iron porch they glide!”

While at:

“The wakeful bloodhound rose and shook
his hide,”

his left hand clenched hard upon the ferns—it was all so real to him, the danger of these lovers on wonderful “St. Agnes’ Eve.” The poem had a double power to move him, because it appealed both to his intelligence as a man and to his emotions as a lover. And, almost unconsciously assuming the character of the dare-all gallant *Porphyro*, he alternately thrilled with joy or made ready to face death for the sake of the bowed mouth and glorious eyes of his *Madeline*—who sat and read with gentle-voiced indifference.

And at the line:

“The key turns and the door upon its
hinges groans,
And they are gone——”

he laid his hand upon the page—for him it always ended there. And, lying for a minute in the fern, it was not

by accident, as she thought, that his boyish brow rested upon her slender foot. It was no accident for, though he loved her with all youth's ardor and man's dominance, his gratitude moved him to a passion of humility, and he bowed his head at the feet of the girl who stood the fair interpreter between himself and the "wonder man"—John Keats!

True she read to him willingly, but asked curiously at times why he cared so much for the mere placing of a few words, "Was not the stated fact the real thing?" And he would quote some stray couplet or line his memory held fast, like—

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But Dred's hands would beat each other with positive anguish: "Amabel! oh, Amabel! can't you hear the music the words make, as he places them? And then: 'I stood tip-toe upon a little hill!' Say that, Amabel, and see if you don't lift up your face to the sky and laugh! You can't help it. I know a half-dozen little bits like that. I'd know lots of longer ones if I could hear you oftener."

"Then take the book, Dred—it's so small you can hide it from Old Man Toler, and read after he falls asleep."

With scarlet, averted face he stood hesitating. A lie was his abomination—yet how could he lower himself further in the eyes of the girl who already bent to notice him—who already called him “Poor fellow!” without knowing that he was that object of pitying contempt, a man who could not read.

With a hard-drawn breath he was just starting his confession, when the girl went on as from a second thought: “Oh, but wait a minute! I haven’t told you what father said,” and hastily she went on to state that the men sent down from Quincy were strange to the place and were, moreover, lazy and shirked their work, and her father had more going on than he could oversee for himself, and if Dred was not hired out already, he would like to have him come up to the home-farm and take hold—but more particularly he wanted him to oversee the strange men.

Now, be it known, this was an honor any of the smaller farmers about would have been proud of, and that would become a year for a man to date from.

“The light hay-crop, why, that was the year before I was overseeing for Bob Stanway!” or “Oh, no! they got married the season I was overseer at Stanway’s big farm,” etc.

Yet here was this young fellow, without an acre to the name he was contemptuously deprived of, who was, moreover, growing sullen and morose as the result of malicious cruelty on his grandfather’s part, and

the boorish clowning of his neighbors, and yet he was offered this position of trust, on the farm where he would gladly have served again as an extra hand. His pleased face suddenly clouded: "I can't!" he said despairingly. "There's the cows! Grandfather won't let me off from them—though Mother and Billy can attend to them easily, now that they pasture. But he'll keep me back for obstinacy. I could do the milking myself and then get to your father's before the men had their porridge if I might ride old Kitty over. But I can't make the distance on foot, Amabel, and be in time, so—" (with dull disappointment in face and voice) "you will have to tell Mr. Stanway, I've only got work for one week, but can't come on grandfather's account."

"Well, if that's all," announced Amabel, "you are coming after all, Mr. Overseer! For Mother anticipated that very bit of malice on Old Man Toler's part, and Father's going to let you have poor Jerry—you know handsome red Jerry, that has that touch of 'halt'—it only comes now and then, and no one will see you anyway by the wood's cut so very early in the morning and so late in the evening, but mercy! Eldred, what a worker you must be! that will be double labor! But it's said a man can't serve two masters, now which one is to suffer, Master Robert Stanway or Zachary Toler?"

"Ah!" replied the elated Dred, "I think I can ar-

range things so that no one need be cheated. Let me serve one master and one mistress!"

"But," laughed Amabel, "I have no money! I could not pay you!"

"Not pay me? You exist Amabel, that is sufficient payment for any effort of mine."

She dropped the heavy fringes of her eyes before his adoring gaze and with dimpling gravity replied: "You are too modest. I think I can afford to add something to your wage." Tantalizingly she ruffled over the leaves of the little brown book, then slipping it back into her pocket, she added: "On Sundays I will give you an hour in the orchard with the 'wonder man,' unless" (pretending not to hear his cry of rapture), "unless you prefer 'The Children of the Abbey?'"

"Good Lord! isn't that that yarn where every soul, men as well as women, keep shedding tears of imbecility?"

"Dred! Dred! tears of *sensibility*, you mean. I think it's a lovely story, so does mother!"

Dred screwed up his mouth as though he had an unfrosted persimmon in it. "It's like unsalted mush. My mother has a better story than that. It's got a red binding with some gold lines on it and it's going to be for me when Mother's gone. It's 'Thaddeus of Warsaw.' Who's that pelting down the road, enough to ruin a horse? Whoa! Fly!"

They had been making their way back toward the

high-road, through their chatter, half sense, half nonsense, when they saw a sandy-haired, red-faced fellow tearing down the road on a sorely overdone animal.

"That's an infernal shame!" declared Dred.

"No, it's Bill Carew!" contradicted Amabel, and they both laughed at the childish jest. "I'm glad," she went on, "he did not see us, he would have been for stopping, and I should not care to shake hands with him drunk."

"Would you shake hands with him sober?" sharply asked Dred, "when it's blood-stained; why, he has killed a man!"

Amabel's head went up, the midnight glory of her eyes blazed full at him: "Well, he did it for a woman! If he shot to kill, it was for his sister's sake; and father says it was the only decent day's work he ever did. Oh, I suppose you think we are savages to feel so, but you must remember the Stanways were mountaineers in Tennessee for generations before father came to Illinois to settle, Eldred, and your born mountaineer does not trouble the courts much. The bullet-pouch and powder-horn beat the jury-box all to pieces in his opinion. And even now, if father were greatly wronged, I'm sure he would go out and argue the case with a shot-gun. Now, if you'll put me up I'll ride over to Grandam Gallaway's and give you time to go and see father, if you care to associate with such bloody-minded people?"

As he put her foot in the stirrup, Dred remarked: "Perhaps you'll see Kate Gallaway's new sister, over there at the old woman's."

"Why, yes. I heard there had been an arrival from the East. Like the rest of the crowd, I suppose?"

"Not much, she isn't!" answered he, emphatically.

"Why, have you seen her—already?" asked Amabel, surprisedly.

"Yes, I went over to see Jason's threshing-machine and ran against her by accident and she's—she's a Christian human being, with some sense and feeling, and unless she's got money, she's going to have a hard row to hoe among those Gallaways!"

Amabel arranged her reins with great pains as she carelessly asked: "What does she look like?"

"A lady!" quickly answered Dred, "all but her hands, they show she works. But she's pretty, fair and blue-eyed."

Amabel gave him a sharp glance: "Oh," she ejaculated, with the very tips of her lips, "a pretty girl, eh?"

"No girl about it, she's a widow, with a little daughter seven or eight years old. But the child don't begin to be as good-looking as her mother."

"I'm going!" curtly broke in Amabel, and with heel pressure and jerked rein, sent Firefly down the road in a cloud of dust.

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suggested vexation, by its very precision of attitude. And the forlorn young giant wiped his forehead on the back of his hand and murmured: "I wonder what I did."

CHAPTER VI

Two Widows and a Maid

Dred had correctly read the expression of Amabel's disappearing figure. She was angry, and her back said so as plainly as did her face; and now as she rode down the dusty road she strove for the first time in her life to analyze a mood, a sudden change of feeling. She had shown an astonishing indifference to herself as an interesting subject for study. She had not "looked into her own being"; had not played the part of botanist toward herself as a human flower, by carefully dissecting every thought, impulse or feeling. She was just the ordinary girl save for her great gift of beauty. She had been quite happy, much after the thoughtless manner of a young lamb or foal in the sunny pasture, but now something had happened and all in a moment she was, to use the vernacular, "real mad."

Suddenly she recalled the manner in which she had left Eldred Hollister, and pulling up her mount, she exclaimed: "What on earth did I do that for! Poor Dred! I left him standing in the road, still speaking. I—I don't know whether to tell Father he will come over to-night or to-morrow—or—why, I never even said good-bye! What ever made me act so! It's cer-

tainly nothing to me that he's so easily taken by a new face! But he need not have raved so over the woman's beauty! Blue eyes and fair skin! He need not have rubbed the fairness in so hard! I know blue eyes mean a fair complexion! I'm not quite a ninny, even if I can't rave over a poet for saying things backwards and making the tail words jingle! 'Blue eyes'! It's no fault of mine that my eyes are so nearly black I have to stand in the sunlight to prove them brown! I know he must hate dark eyes, because he thrashed a boy years ago for yelling at me, 'Black eye, pick a pie, turn around and tell a lie!' Now, it's all 'blue-eyed beauty, do your mother's duty' with him, I suppose! It's nothing to me, of course'' (that was fully proved by quick-rising tears). "But oh, who could have believed that square jaw, that steady glance, meant inconstancy to—to—old friends! Well'' (with a big sigh of satisfaction), "he can't support a wife yet—be she ever so blue-eyed, and I'm just glad of it! And I'll read every single line of 'Endymion' to him, if he wants me to! Brown eyes are as good to read with as blue ones—and I'll see that that handsome boy is not turned into a step-father before he knows what he's about!"

Having by a line of reasoning, comprehensible only to herself, arrived at the conclusion that Eldred's liberty was endangered by the fascinations of the blue-eyed widow from the East, she resolved to protect him by keeping him at her own side till danger was passed.

And this decision bringing back her good temper, she rode blithely on, wishing that for her curiosity's sake the stranger might be calling at old Granny Gallaway's—for certainly the old woman would never again cross the threshold of that Catherine Gallaway in this world! So the newcomer would have to go to her, if there was to be any acquaintance between them. And just at that thought the old log building appeared at the brow of the slight rise in the road, hanging there in the enclosing boughs of the trees like a great old nest from which the brood had flown.

Two stories high, from its size it was known to the people about as a double-house. In earlier days, when the entire family was sheltered there, even the trundle-beds were crowded with the swarthy black-eyed brood of Gallaways; but now there was left just one son, Nash, the youngest, though he was nearing forty, who had turned his back upon love and marriage, even upon the joys of bachelor freedom, to devote himself with taciturn loyalty to the old, old woman, who was his mother. The strange old woman, who, living among them all for four decades, was yet an alien, and had the Red Sea rolled between her and her neighbors it could not have separated them more widely than did that drop of Romany blood racing restlessly through all her veins; while the respect they felt for her honesty and her kindness in times of trouble was but a scanty cloak with which to hide their fear of that

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Suddenly she recalled the manner in which she had left Eldred Hollister, and pulling up her mount, she exclaimed: "What on earth did I do that for! Poor Dred! I left him standing in the road, still speaking. I—I don't know whether to tell Father he will come over to-night or to-morrow—or—why, I never even said good-bye! What ever made me act so! It's cer-

tainly nothing to me that he's so easily taken by a new face! But he need not have raved so over the woman's beauty! Blue eyes and fair skin! He need not have rubbed the fairness in so hard! I know blue eyes mean a fair complexion! I'm not quite a ninny, even if I can't rave over a poet for saying things backwards and making the tail words jingle! 'Blue eyes'! It's no fault of mine that my eyes are so nearly black I have to stand in the sunlight to prove them brown! I know he must hate dark eyes, because he thrashed a boy years ago for yelling at me, 'Black eye, pick a pie, turn around and tell a lie!' Now, it's all 'blue-eyed beauty, do your mother's duty' with him, I suppose! It's nothing to me, of course" (that was fully proved by quick-rising tears). "But oh, who could have believed that square jaw, that steady glance, meant inconstancy to—to—old friends! Well" (with a big sigh of satisfaction), "he can't support a wife yet—be she ever so blue-eyed, and I'm just glad of it! And I'll read every single line of 'Endymion' to him, if he wants me to! Brown eyes are as good to read with as blue ones—and I'll see that that handsome boy is not turned into a step-father before he knows what he's about!"

Having by a line of reasoning, comprehensible only to herself, arrived at the conclusion that Eldred's liberty was endangered by the fascinations of the blue-eyed widow from the East, she resolved to protect him by keeping him at her own side till danger was passed.

And this decision bringing back her good temper, she rode blithely on, wishing that for her curiosity's sake the stranger might be calling at old Granny Gallaway's—for certainly the old woman would never again cross the threshold of that Catherine Gallaway in this world! So the newcomer would have to go to her, if there was to be any acquaintance between them. And just at that thought the old log building appeared at the brow of the slight rise in the road, hanging there in the enclosing boughs of the trees like a great old nest from which the brood had flown.

Two stories high, from its size it was known to the people about as a double-house. In earlier days, when the entire family was sheltered there, even the trundle-beds were crowded with the swarthy black-eyed brood of Gallaways; but now there was left just one son, Nash, the youngest, though he was nearing forty, who had turned his back upon love and marriage, even upon the joys of bachelor freedom, to devote himself with taciturn loyalty to the old, old woman, who was his mother. The strange old woman, who, living among them all for four decades, was yet an alien, and had the Red Sea rolled between her and her neighbors it could not have separated them more widely than did that drop of Romany blood racing restlessly through all her veins; while the respect they felt for her honesty and her kindness in times of trouble was but a scanty cloak with which to hide their fear of that

strange inheritance, her instinctive knowledge of Zingari lore. For though she remembered certain teachings given in her faraway girlhood, as to the uses of herbs and roots and barks, her powers of "predictin'," her "seein' of things" were incomprehensible even to herself. Indeed, her case was not unlike that of the collie puppy, bottle-raised in a great city, who, running away, one day, came upon his first flock of sheep in the public park, and gazing at them, his utter amazement soon turned to perfect joy and instantly he set to work to bunch them nicely together and drove them gently but firmly through the streets to his master's doorstep.

But there was certainly little love lost between old Grandam Gallaway, who had been Rebekah Arata in her girlhood, and her neighbors; for, if they feared her, she held them in contempt as "house-dwellers" and "double-faces" who, while condemning her for un-Christian knowledge, would yet have gladly profited by its exercise in their behalf. But she used angrily to declare she was no fortune-teller; she "never owned a card in her hull life, an' she had harder work ter do than swashin' 'tea-grounds' round the bottom of a cup!" "Only, mebbe," the inquirer "had better keep away from the river for a month or so," or, perhaps, "a man ain't any too friendly to you," or "you'd do as well ter watch your stock purty keerful." "No," she'd say, "she didn't want nothin' for a word of

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"Thank-ee!" and the would-be client would depart creepy with terror, for who could doubt the truth of Grandam Gallaway's warnings, since she had said to the "lunkhead" of the settlement, "You're goin' ter be regular blood-soaked," and, as he was a known coward, every one roared with laughter at the old woman's words. She flushed red when she heard she had been mocked, and asked, meaningly, "Did I say whose was the blood?" And when ten days later the unfortunate who had gone to Quincy to visit his married sister had had his arm torn from his body by machinery in a paper-mill, Rebekah was justified.

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While at about the same hour Old Man Toler, a couple of miles away was ordering his daughter Hulda Hollister to fill a basket with bran and ride over and see if that old half-breed Gallaway could let him have “a settin’ of guinea-hen’s eggs. That full-grown pair of guineas he got of her had been so cussed wild, they’d taken to the woods and he was out that much by his dealin’s with her.”

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"Certainly," replied Selina.

"And yer go punchin' holes inter it on purpose? Why, that ain't right! Why don't yer take some'ing old?"

Selina spread out the work and tried to explain, but Grandmother Gallaway shook her head, saying: "I don't see as anybody has any call to jab holes in good stuff, jes' ter show off how nice they can overcast the edges agin! For erbout sixty years I've been tryin' ter sew up the holes other folkses has made in their duds. Hulda Hollister, Hulda Toler as was, tried ter do that sort of thing onct—jes' after she and ther Brat come back on him, and ther Old Man Toler, he jes' up and dragged it outen her hands and chucked it inter the fire! Wal, I don't hold with that, she's a good sight better'n the old skinflint that fathered her, and that boy of her'n, he knows more erbout roots and yarbs and birds and their doin's than anybody in these parts. And he's allers ready ter help the women that

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With incredulous laughter at her own suggestion she went forward to greet the latest arrival. "Go right in," she said, not mentioning that there was already a visitor within, and, without a thought of the

embarrassment of the two strangers with no one to introduce them, she took up the bridle and led the rack-ing gray to the stable.

Therefore Mrs. Hollister, in battered old hat, cheap and hideous paper cambric riding-skirt, entering, found herself face to face with the newcomer, Selina Marsh, who had risen at her entrance. Their eyes met in a long silence that was full of strange happenings. Both were widowed, both were victims of profligate men who had ignored the sanctity of marriage. Each one, crushing her pride, had bent her neck painfully to a heavy yoke for the sake of a child. Slowly, closely hand clasped hand. The smile of conventional courtesy softened into tenderness, an abnormal understanding grew upon them. Frank by nature, both had become through force of circumstances absolutely reticent and secretive, save in warmly sympathetic and encouraging surroundings, and with upleaping hearts these weary women felt that in each other's presence they might safely cast aside the subterfuge and concealment and once more know the joy of unguarded speech, of looking fearlessly into another's face.

When Grandam Gallaway returned they were still standing hand in hand and Selina was saying: "You are Eldred's mother—therefore Mrs. Hollister?" and the other woman, with the torpor all gone from her sadly faded face, made answer: "And I'd know

you, Mrs. Marsh, anywhere I saw you, from my boy's description, which was perfect, even" (with a laugh) "down to the silk apron."

At which old Rebekah struck her hand against the chinked wall and cried: "Wal, if that don't beat the circus *and* the elliphant! Why, Huldý Hollister, I ha'in't heerd yer laugh right out like that since yer come back with little Dred—mor'n sixteen year ago! Jes' a little stretchin' of the lips inter a grin hain't no real laugh! Now set right down, both on yer, while I get out the cups! Say, Seliny, what yer think that young 'un of your'n's been and done?"

"What?" asked the suspicious mother, sharply, starting to rise. "Has she done anything wrong?"

"Why, Selina," commented the old dame, "I'm afeared ye'r rather free with the rod, bean't yer—to be so ready ter jump onter her, first thing? But it was only a city child's doin's, she didn't mean no harm. Poor little white breeches, erlong she comes through the sun, with her hat plumb full of eggs for me—proud as Esther on the throne!" (and with a long laugh.) "She'd took 'em from a nest whar they've been sot on now for nine days! The hen was off feedin' or she'd have got the devil and all from black Betty, who pecks and scratches and hollers whenever you go near the old fool. 'Course I had ter hurry the clutch back afore they got chilled; and as little stiff-breeches had tears of disappointment bilin' up in her eyes, I sent her ter

the barn whar speckled Hannah's been layin' her eggs under the farthest manger for a week or more, an' told her whatever she found thar or anywhar else in the barn she could have for hersel', an', Seliny, if she dents them zinc trousers of hern, thar won't be no call to whack her, as I can see!"

As Mrs. Gallaway skimmed for their coffee the newly risen cream from a crock of morning's milk, Selina remarked in an explanatory tone: "Grandmother has declared war against May's pantalettes. If the child suffered as much from wearing them as Grandmother does from looking at them, she would be an object of deserved pity."

"That seems rather inconsistent," smiled Mrs. Hollister, "since Grandam Gallaway herself wore old Azariah's breeches for years before he 'passed on,' as she expresses it. But, Mrs. Marsh, it is a pleasant sight to see once more a girl-child wholly and properly clothed. I pulled the horse up for a moment and paused down the road a bit, just to look at those little strap and button slippers and white pantalettes. I see" (glancing at the cambric on the window sill) "you do your own embroidery. It's a delightful occupation for a woman of leisure."

"I suppose so," admitted Selina, then with a whimsical gravity she extended her work-hardened hand, in mute avowal of her humble position in life. "You must not jump to conclusions, Mrs. Hollister. My few

bits of embroidery and an occasional new story are the fruits of an hour stolen now and then from sleep." And the quick light that sprang into Hulda's eyes at the mention of reading, led her to cry out distressedly: "Oh, Mrs. Hollister, my sister has not one single book in her house!"

Grandam Gallaway, pouring the coffee, promptly interposed the statement, that if that was the only thing against Kate Gallaway, "not hevin' no book inter her house, she'd be a darn sight decenter woman than she was!" Both women looked distressed, and she went on: "Have a hunk of that short cake, both on you, and Huldy, you help out that honey. Your boy had some of that a few days ago and I hearn him sayin' some charm over it. I listen'd close, but it's one I dunno. Thar wassen't no Romany in it—sum-thing about 'honey-cells' and som' kind of 'flower-bells.' Now, Seliny, drink up your coffee. I think a hull lot of you an' so does Nash, but yer ha'in't winter'd and summer'd yet with that sister of your'n, an' God help yer when yer have! You'll feel her claws soon! She calls me a half-breed, does she? Calls me an Old Gypsy—wal! I hain't no stealin' gypsy, and she darsen't stan' beside me and lift up her sly face ter God Almighty's lightnin' and say, 'I'm not a stealin' house-dweller!' No, she darsen't! She'd be struck right in her tracks with the lie burnt black on her lips! I'm a gypsy, am I? Wal, I'd be willin' ter be

a witch and straddle a broom-stick and carry a cat on my shoulder, if I could squat on her chest and set my claws in her flesh and make her see the dead face of my old man, she shamed in his coffin! Damn her! Set right down now, Seliny, yer ha'in't been here long—but you've *seen* your mother, though I'll bet my loom against a pipe of terbaccy yer ha'in't had no private talk with her? No? I knew yer hadn't. Nash saw Kate's pale blue eyes watchin' yer and John and your mother! Now, jes' fix up a plate of honey and cake for that May child of your'n, for I see her comin' now with som'thin' in her hat!"

And Mrs. Hollister, eager to change the distressing subject, asked: "What book had been most popular in the East when she left there?" and Selina promptly replied, "'Little Dorrit,' a new story by Charles Dickens."

"Oh, how I wish I could read it, how I wish I could tell it to Eldred!"

"Tell it?" questioned Selina, "Does he not allow himself time or—or is he too lazy, through your spoiling, to read for himself?"

The blood flew into Hulda's face. She drooped her head in shamed silence for a moment, then indignantly exclaimed: "My boy is twenty years old, Mrs. Marsh, and, thanks to his grandfather's hatred, he can't read, though he swears he will do so as soon as he can break

away from his bitter tutelage, and be as other boys are! Listen!"——

May was chattering excitedly to Grandam Gallaway about her adventures in the barn, while the old woman, showing her how to roast an egg in hot ashes, did not notice the galloping of an approaching horse. It stopped short at her gate. Selina looking out, exclaimed: "What a lovely picture!"

"Which?" grinned the old woman, who was now peering through the window, "beast or gal?"

"Both," replied Selina: "Who is she?" looking at the dark radiance of soft eyes and cloudy hair, and again: "Who is she?" noting the correct habit, gloves and hat.

"Amabel Stanway—the best-off gal in this county!" said Grandam.

"Amabel Stanway, the goddess of my boy's idolatry!" murmured Hulda Hollister.

"I've a message, Granny," called the girl. "Father wants you to come over and finish up the weaving of that carpet Mother began! Come in and tell you? Yes, thank you, if I may! You see I'm not afraid of you now, Mrs. Gallaway, as I was when you told me you saw blood on my hand!"

She laughed gaily as she dismounted, throwing the bridle over the gate post, and entering, shook the hand of Hulda, while all the time her lovely lustrous eyes followed the movements of the blue-eyed widow—

who was waiting on May. Introduced, she welcomed the stranger very prettily and "hoped she might enjoy her stay—or visit, to Illinois."

Oh, clever Amabel, trying to lead up to a statement of intention on the widow's part! But when was a girl clever enough to trap a widow! This one did not take the cue offered. A little chat followed, Grandam promised to go over next week and finish a "hit-and-miss" rag carpet for Mrs. Stanway, and as Amabel was about to draw on her glove she laughingly held out her hand and said with mock anger: "Granny Gallaway told me there was blood on that hand; now I leave it to you, *is* there? But that was several years ago, so I suppose it has been fading out!"

She caught up her skirt and ran lightly out to her horse, and again falling into that flat lifeless tone, the old woman muttered: "Fading, eh? it's brighter this time than burning red flame, honey!"

Presently Hulda, having carefully packed the guinea eggs in the basket of bran, not daring to loiter, from fear of her father's rage, prepared to leave. Selina, who had consented to remain until the arrival of the beloved son, Nash, walked to the gate with her. Grandam Gallaway led out the racker, Hulda mounted and, looking down into the eyes of the woman to whom she was so drawn, extended her hand again, just as Selina offered hers. For one instant both palms were held out in the full sunlight. Granny Gallaway gazed

at them like one amazed, then passed her hand over her keen old eyes and stood there with trembling, rapidly moving lips.

The racker went off up the road, Selina, holding her hand above her head to ward off the sun's rays, ran in doors, and Grandam Gallaway muttered to herself: "Wal, I'm doggorned! two widders and a maid—no kin ter one another—yet I seen in their hands, plumb, clear and plain, that they're all three on 'em stained with the same man's blood! But whose? whose? Eh? No, little gal, I can't show yer what they're doin' on the inside of that bee-hive."

CHAPTER VII

The Perfidy of a Man

One evening at early candle-light Eldred Hollister was riding through the soft dusk, and just as miners come sometimes by chance upon veins of ore wandering blindly through the earth, so he came now and again upon veins of sweetest perfume wandering through the air; and twice following them they led him once to a great all-whitened syringa shrub, once to the first opening blossoms of a locust tree, and all the frail, winged creatures of the night seemed gathering there, invited by the sweet odor and guided by the pale glimmering of the white spreaders of the banquet.

As the young man felt soft thumps upon cheek and throat from hurrying, blundering moths, he laughed: "If that pugnacious humming-bird that lives in our old butternut tree next the trumpet-creeper knew of this he'd never sleep another wink. I swear the little glutton keeps our butterflies so thin and weak they can scarcely rise over a five-rail fence. But we must be getting on, Jerry. I've got to leave that message for Mother, poor Mother!"

A few moments later he drew rein before the gateless Gallaway fence. His "Hello!" was recognized

and answered by a "Won't yer 'light?" of such prohibitory coldness, such mechanical utterance, that he felt anew all the humiliation of the unwelcomed.

"No!" he answered, curtly, "I won't get down! Can I see Mrs. Marsh a moment?"

"Selina? yes, I reckon so," and Jason stepping into the house, Eldred distinctly heard him say: "Hulda's Brat wants ter see Selina."

"Wal," snapped Catharine, "tell him, in a minute. She's helpin' Mother ter bed, though I dunno what help's required. She's allers helped hersel', leg or no leg. Seems ter me young 'uns most eight and old women past sixty ought ter be able ter get ter bed without any helpin'. Oh, Selina! if yer through with yer coddlin' of Mother, Hulda's Brat's waitin' outside ter speak ter yer! Though I don't see what on earth for! Yes, you know well enough I mean Dred Hollister!"

As Selina Marsh approached and saw the lad remove his hat and bow stiffly, she knew he had heard every word spoken inside, and impulsively she held up her hand to him, saying: "It's good of you to come around this way, for it's quite out of your direct route, I believe. Won't you dismount? No? How is Mrs. Hollister?"

The pleasure of hearing his mother spoken of with the respect due her made Eldred's throat tighten, and he stammered over his first words: "She's—Mother's

pretty well—at least she's way behind with Granddad's shirts and things. She's had such a felon on her finger, she couldn't sew for quite awhile—but now—he does go on so—she's working day and night both, trying to catch up—before haying comes on with all that extra cooking to be done. But oh, Mrs. Marsh, before I forget, here's something for your little girl May." He carefully handed down a small plant, the ball of earth about the roots tied in the corner of a colored cotton handkerchief. "It's no earthly value, only I couldn't bear her to think I was lying to her, and she just couldn't believe that a real for-true geranium ever grew wild. So I just dug up a spotted geranium for her, with its purply red blossom on it—all safe. Please damp it a bit, so it may be alive yet when she gets up."

"Oh, Mr. Hollister, how good of you!" cried Selina. "I will set the plant out properly, and May will be so happy and proud. She'll have it named before noon, as if it were a dog or a cat."

Eldred seemed much gratified that he had not been laughed at for his pains, and proceeded to deliver his message: "Grandfather Toler will be down in the bottoms all of to-morrow at a barn-raising, and oh, Mrs. Marsh, if you could go over to the house—if you only could! Mother does so want to see you, and Grandfather so seldom stays away a whole day, and—it's not nice to say, you will think us a strange people—but

Grandfather is—er—well, he forgets who he is speaking to sometimes. So Mother never ventures to invite any one when he is at home. But to-morrow—why, Mother was all of a tremble when I left her at five o'clock this morning—so anxious as to whether you would or would not come."

"Say to your mother, Mr. Hollister—"

"Oh, Mrs. Marsh," he interrupted, "won't you please call me Dred? I feel as if you were making fun of me when you say Mr. Hollister."

"Very well, Dred, say to your mother, I will come quite early to-morrow and will bring my thimble and, working together on your grandfather's garments, we will catch up with her delayed sewing. Oh, that is, if I may bring May—she will be very quiet"—

"Bring her, of course; Mother expects her, and there's no need for her to be quiet. Of course, if Grandad was home, why—but Mother, God bless her! she would like every one to be happy. You will come, then? Ah, but you are good! If only I could do you a service, Mrs. Marsh, a real one, I mean, done at some cost to myself!"

"Perhaps you will—some day," she said, and laughed as she shook his strong young hand. For there was no Romany blood in her, no second sight, no reading of the future; and the true word is often spoken in jest.

Next morning Selina learned that Jason Gallaway,

also, was going to the barn-raising in the bottoms, and he offered to "give her a lift" on her way over to the old Toler place, providing she could be ready as soon as he and 'Lonzo and the horses were. And Selina flew about, making beds and "brushing out" the tiny bedrooms, before going over "to help Mrs. Hollister with her delayed sewing"—an expression of Mrs. Marsh's own invention and meant to smooth down the uprising quills of Kate's temper, which would have been furious had she suspected an "*in-vite*" to visit had been extended to her sister alone.

May too was very busy. She had to water the wonderful wild geranium and print its new name on a chip, by way of label; a name very carefully thought out, that, amusing Grandma and 'Lonzo, brought from her Aunt Catharine the angry assertion: "That it was nothin' but sassy impertinence and that she'd shake airy young-un of hers well that made up such a thing!"

"C-o-r-r-e-c-t!" drawled 'Lonzo, "and in case of your dyin' before airy one of them does such a thing, here, in the presence of witnesses, I solemnly swear that I'll take the job over for you! Say, May! come here! what's that name agin? I don't want to get it mixed with my prayers or Captain Kidd: 'As we sailed!' yer know—so let's have it now!"

"I think you are making fun, Mr. 'Lonzo, but Mama said I might name my plant."

"I don't doubt it, sweet infant! I shorely don't;

for, if you had taken such a liberty without permission, you would have had another warm memory of youth to summon in age. Why don't you go on about that name?"

"Well, it's a spotted wild geranium, you know, and Mr. Eldred gave it to me for my very own, and so I first named it Speckle (that's for the spots, of course), and Dred (for Mr. Hollister), and that makes Speckledred Marsh. Now, if you ask again I'll know you are making fun. Oh, there's the wagon; let's go!" It was a big blue-painted box on red-painted running gear, and had one board seat for the driver. Jason told 'Lonzo to bring out a chair for Selina, but the man, noting the morosely watchful eyes of Catharine, seeking for offence, muttered: "Better not, Gallaway, Mrs. Marsh won't mind the board seat. It's not so very far that we go, and I can stand up, or sit on the floor with my little feet hanging out behind."

Selina made an unwilling clamber over the fence; she had not yet learned to negotiate the rails, with the *insouciance* peculiar to local femininity. The *modus operandi* was for the lady to climb up the inner side of the fence, and at the top rail to extend herself with perfect frankness upon her stomach, then to lightly toss over her inferior extremities and, finally, like a bear, to descend backward to the ground. Naturally much practice was required to attain a really swift turn over at the top rail, and Selina, it must be con-

fessed, neglected practice, even going so far as to follow Watch's method of squeezing through the fence between the second and third rails where possible. But that way involved the pulling of her hair by top splinters and the scraping off of waist buttons by bottom ones—buttons, that in spite of warning cries and blood-curdling threats, Watch frequently caught and swallowed. So that she generally clambered to the top of the fence and then, closing her eyes, jumped. A good solid, stiff-kneed jolt ensued, that enabled her to see large luminous bodies in spite of closed eyes. And this she did in face of 'Lonzo's warning "that such fence climbing was very loosening to the teeth."

Presently they were off, leaving a pallid, condemning face frowning out of one door and a pain-drawn face faintly smiling at them from the other. And the wistful smile of Grandmother Parsell hurt Selina more than did the frown of her sister Kate.

On the very evening of Selina's arrival her heart had failed her, but now she felt that her intelligence was failing her too. What was wrong here? She was bright, alert, had seen much of life, yet in this startlingly primitive household, where one would look for perfect simplicity, for the open frankness of ignorance, she was aware of strange restraints, unsleeping watchfulness, and, incredible as it seemed to her reason, she nevertheless felt beneath the commonplace surface life an underlying fear, fear seen in the baleful eyes of

Kate, heard in the hesitations, the stumblings of the swarthy ear-ringed Jason, and felt in the quick tremblings that came upon the frail old body of the beloved mother. But why? why was she, daughter, sister, aunt, forced to stand alone and as a stranger before this whole family—on guard? What did it all mean, she asked herself, as she rode through the vivid green of the young summer-time.

Suddenly May, who, perched on the edge of the seat between her mother and uncle, gave a gasp of excitement: "Mama! oh, if you please, I saw something with a tail—a hairy not a feather tail, up in that very tree! What was it, do you think?"

The hired man, standing up behind with his hands resting on Gallaway's shoulders for support, gravely answered: "That was a rabbit."

"Oh!" earnestly protested May, "I think not, Mr. 'Lonzo, because Mama gave me a bunny once and it had a weeny short bit of tail—very white underneath."

"Ha! ha!" rumbled Jason. "That proves that you fed it well. The whiter the tail, the fatter the rabbit."

"Yes," nodded May, "Mama always feeds things well, Uncle Jay."

"Of course," said 'Lonzo, whose words were jolted out of him. "Of course, she feeds things well—she's a widder! Why, widders will even feed a man with good heartening food if—er—all right, Mrs. Marsh, I

didn't mean anything to offend. Here we are!" As he lifted May down, he added, "Come to think of it—that was a squirrel that you saw—carrying its tail in that tree. Well, good-bye!"

Selina and May were about to open the unpainted old picket gate, when the child suddenly cried: "Uncle Jay! wait please! I—I dropped my knitting in the wagon!"

"Knittin'!" shouted 'Lonzo. "What under the canopy of heaven can you knit?"

"I'm making a pair of garters," severely replied May, "for my Grandmother Gallaway; they are a present."

"Why, May!" said Jason, handing down the little calico work-bag, "Mother's wropped about seven feet of list 'round her legs for garters ever since I can remember."

"What's list?" asked the child, with a troubled face.

"Why it's ther selvage offen flannel, honey. She can't change! You'd better spar' yer trouble."

"I might give them to my own grandmother," she doubtfully ventured. "I've got a whole lot done, you see, and—" Then suddenly her face brightened, and she finished with: "If Grandma don't wear knit garters, I can keep them till I grow up and Mama can give them to me for a wedding gift."

And as the men drove off in a gale of laughter, Selina called out: "Are you coming, or are you going to

stand there all day, May?" and next moment Mrs. Hollister, with flushed cheeks and shining eyes, came, fairly running down the weed-grown path to meet them, and with a sort of shock, Selina realized that this woman had once been beautiful.

It is surprising what an illuminating power color has upon the human countenance. Take a face that seems dulled and faded into utter plainness and set a pink flush on either cheek and deeply redden the mouth, and lo, a miracle! The warm flush beneath it heightens the luster of the eye; the red of the mouth emphasizes the curving line of the lips—a beauty lost in general pallor. But Mrs. Hollister's face was not only touched with color, but so lighted up with tremulous hope, so sweetened with pleasure, that all trace of her usual dull apathy, her passive misery, disappeared, leaving her eager, animated, almost young again.

As Mrs. Marsh stooped to remove May's hat, she whispered loudly, after the manner of childhood: "Mama, Mrs. Hollister's got lots of little yellowy crinkles in her hair, just like Mr. Dred's—did you see?"

"I see you need a lesson to keep you from making remarks about people," answered her mother sharply. "But, Mama," explained May, timidly, "they are pretty crinklies, and—and I only whispered about them."

Unhappy child, she had not bettered things, for Selina, with a threatening look in her blue eyes, remarked: "Perhaps you can remember how many times you have been told not to whisper? We will come to an understanding to-night. There, don't let me see you cry!"

"Please, Mrs. Marsh," interposed Mrs. Hollister, "don't break her poor little heart. I couldn't help hearing what she said, and—" (drawing May to her side, who was swallowing hard and often to keep back her tears) "I'm so glad she can see anything of my boy in me, that I want to kiss her 'thank you.'" She suited the action to the word, then went on: "I don't know what she is to do for amusement all day, alone. If she were a little older I could offer her some books, but—eh?"

Such "Ohs!" had broken from mother and child, and such eager light shone in their eyes that surprise silenced her, and Mrs. Marsh cried: "Mrs. Hollister, the child has read since she was four, and she is literally starving for books. If you will trust her with something, she will handle it with the greatest care, and be the happiest creature in the State!"

And Mrs. Hollister, laughing gaily, began to unbutton and remove May's white apron and pink print dress; then bringing out a night-gown of her own, she basted it up short enough for walking; put May into it, led her to the foot of a steep little staircase,

gave her a push and said: "There, go to the dusty old attic and rummage in the big box. There, over in the corner are some 'Godey's Lady's Books,' with fashion plates in them. Just take what you want and go where you please afterward. There's no one on the place to see you, dear—and I—I guess Mama wants to forgive you first, for whispering?" she added, noting the wistful, backward glance of the sensitive and grieving child.

And Selina went to the stair and kissed her into radiant happiness, and no more was seen or heard of May that day, save when she was positively ordered to the table for food.

"Dear Mrs. Marsh," asked Hulda, as they gathered up the heap of work already cut out, and moved toward the wide, cool entry to settle themselves to their sewing, "don't be vexed at my freedom, but why are you so very exacting with that little thing? She is such a gentle child; why are you so severe?"

"Why?" repeated Selina, with flushing face and a flash of the eye. "Why? because she has to live in other people's houses—because I have to work for my living, and a strange child, always unwelcome, may only be tolerated in the house as a very paragon of silent obedience! That's why the rod is always so close to my hand! It's not exactly a joyous life that is led by the mother of the unwelcome child," ended Selina, with a bitter smile.

And Mrs. Hollister, leaning back in her chair, pressed both hands to her temples and exclaimed: "You, too? dear God! you, too? Why, Mrs. Marsh, every bite of food my boy takes is counted, every miserable garment he wears is made rough with curses! We work unceasingly, like slaves, but what of that? My own father makes a mock of us—proclaims us 'drag and burden,' and all this misery is caused by——"

She paused, and Selina completed the sentence: "The perfidy of a man!"

And Hulda, looking with hot, bright eyes at her, questioned: "And your own sorrow?"

And again and more bitterly, Selina repeated: "The perfidy of a man!"

At which both women broke into dreary laughter—then for a long time they worked with a silent, fierce intensity. But speech was boiling up toward Hulda's long-sealed lips, and presently in a muffled voice, she said: "Your lot is hard, but you are not shamed like me. Think, my child is called 'the Brat,' as if"—(passionately) "as if he were a bastard!"

"You are mistaken," replied Selina, dully. "You do not know what shame is! But I—who am the wife of a bigamist do—for, in the eyes of the law my child *is* a *bastard!*"

With a cry of pity, Hulda caught the woman's hands and pressed her cheek to them, and then with a rush she began to speak.

CHAPTER VIII

The Man with the White Hat

"It is your comprehending sympathy that is rolling away the stone of sixteen years' silence from the sepulcher of my heart. Oh, the joy of once more feeling a touch of the pity that is not contemptuous, of knowing that even though you may condemn my judgment you will still appreciate the unselfishness of my intention in that dread time of trial, when there was none to advise. I am not going to tell you of the old, old story, that is ever new and always interesting—but of the old, old tragedy that is never new and never interesting to any one but its victim 'The Tragedy of Married Love Betrayed.'

"My father is a bigot and a miser—my husband was an atheist and a spendthrift. Between them they have turned me into this" (with a contemptuous gesture, she swept her hand downward from brow to toe). "Taunted, jeered, all day I toil like a slave, and half the night prostrate before the throne, I pray God to protect my boy from the influence of his father on one side, and from that of his grandfather on the other—that dread influence of the blood in our veins that is stronger than training, stronger than reason, stronger than anything

save God's mercy! You have not seen my father yet, have you? I thought not. But you have heard of him, I am very sure—have heard him called 'Old Skin-flint Toler.' Don't flush, mere conventional politeness is not highly esteemed in this region, and I am sorry to say Father has earned his nickname. He is irascible and disputatious. He has been at variance with every farmer of the country-side. He is continually in litigation over some trifling matter. Just one person in this world has had the power to open his close-clenched fist, and that was my mother. It took the mightiest effort of her life to secure for me a sort of education, and, so long as we both shall live, Father will never cease to cast into my face that monstrous waste of precious money.

"Mrs. Marsh, if ever there was a random marriage, that marriage was mine. Father, with the amiable intention of frightening Mother by his imprudence, had gone to the city one day alone, driving his handsome young pacing stallion Wildfire. I had named the animal and I think that was the only thing I ever did that won Father's approval—though he often said that had he 'not been a professin' Christian, he would have called the horse Hell-fire!' Not that he was vicious—far from it—but being nervous, excitable and ambitious, he construed every possible sound or movement into a challenge of speed; while the sight of any unusual object on the roadside started him off in a

frantic struggle to get out of his own handsome, black skin. Mother begged him to take the old team, warning him of the effect city sights and sounds might have on Wildfire, but all in vain. She had purchased from a pedler a small bottle of flavoring extract of vanilla the day before, and though she had used her own butter and egg money, Father was simply furious with rage at the senseless extravagance, and vowed he was going to see his lawyer in Quincy and fix his money so that there 'couldn't be no extracts of nuthin' bought when he had gone harpin' up above!' He bitterly declared it to be his opinion, 'that she'd buy scented hair ile 'fore he was cold in his grave—if he didn't tie up his money so she couldn't'! And off he went, grinning maliciously at Mother's frightened face when Wildfire stood on end at the sudden emerging of a hissing old gander from the tall weeds by the fence.

"'Oh, my dear!' said Mother, when he had disappeared in a cloud of dust, 'that poor little bottle of essence has washed away the last hope of a melodeon for you to play on! No—don't say dulcimer, either! I couldn't get a jew's-harp out of him now!'

"And though I took as much of the work from her as I could, and sang 'The Land o' the Leal' to her as often as she wished, she had nevertheless worried herself into a nervous headache long before Father drove safely home in a most remarkably affable state of mind.

"A young man in Quincy 'had been struck all of a

heap,' he said, by the speed and beauty of Wildfire, and had tried to buy him, 'and Mother,' his eyes gleaming with fierce exultation, 'I'm dumgasted if he didn't offer me—offer me, mind yer, fifty dollars mor'n the highest price I ever sot on him!'

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expense of my support, and while I was marveling over the wondrous thing that had come to pass, and kneeling to thank God and make vows of undying loyalty and devotion to this man, who honored me with his love, he was writing to a friend that: 'The bit of calico he had found down here was the prettiest piece of goods in the State, but damned costly—for he'd got to pay the full price, *matrimony*. But then, after all, a man had to marry some time! and here was beauty, good health and a babe's innocence. So that he and she would line up at the starting-post on Wednesday next and the parson would give the starting word at 2 p. m. He hoped they would pass under the wire together—at all events he had no intention to bolt off the course and leave such a pretty "critter" to run the race alone.' "

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my own—and though so little, a time may come when it will be like Mother's hand held out to you. Don't speak of it—just keep it for the great emergency that I hope may never come to you. Don't look frightened, you may sew it into dozens of corsets and never have need of it. Still I wish you to keep it by you—a little foolish secret, the last one between you and me.'

"Oh, Mother! Mother!" For the first time she broke into bitter weeping, and Selina silently slipped an arm about her and drew her close.

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of games of chance. His father tried to train him for business, but all his thoughts were with the trainers of horses—he was simply incorrigible.

“His mother wept and reproached openly, secretly she helped him out of many a scrape. His father gave him a check of 1,000 dollars: he raised it to 10,000. Frightened and ashamed, old Mr. Hollister tried to conceal the affair from public knowledge, but Harry thought it a fine joke, because, as he said, ‘he had raised his father 10,000 instead of his *ante*.’

“Through the tender machinations of his mother, the grandmother, Mrs. Josephine Lenoir, was induced to leave the greater part of her small fortune to the good-looking young reprobate, who kissed and laughed at her and took the diamonds from her wasted old fingers, to wear himself for months at a time, and whom she thought a very gay and gallant, but much misunderstood young man. And that inheritance brought to an end all legitimate endeavor.

“He retained a few brilliant scraps of the liberal education his father had wasted upon him, also the charming manner caught from the women of his family——”

“Ah!” interposed Selina, in a tone of recognition, “a charming manner, which doubtless could be donned or doffed——”

“Like a suit of clothes,” swiftly assented Hulda.

And Selina added: “I, also, owe a heavy debt to a gracious manner—but go on.”

Unhappy child, she had not bettered things, for Selina, with a threatening look in her blue eyes, remarked: "Perhaps you can remember how many times you have been told not to whisper? We will come to an understanding to-night. There, don't let me see you cry!"

"Please, Mrs. Marsh," interposed Mrs. Hollister, "don't break her poor little heart. I couldn't help hearing what she said, and—" (drawing May to her side, who was swallowing hard and often to keep back her tears) "I'm so glad she can see anything of my boy in me, that I want to kiss her 'thank you.'" She suited the action to the word, then went on: "I don't know what she is to do for amusement all day, alone. If she were a little older I could offer her some books, but—eh?"

Such "Ohs!" had broken from mother and child, and such eager light shone in their eyes that surprise silenced her, and Mrs. Marsh cried: "Mrs. Hollister, the child has read since she was four, and she is literally starving for books. If you will trust her with something, she will handle it with the greatest care, and be the happiest creature in the State!"

And Mrs. Hollister, laughing gaily, began to unbutton and remove May's white apron and pink print dress; then bringing out a night-gown of her own, she basted it up short enough for walking; put May into it, led her to the foot of a steep little staircase,

gave her a push and said: "There, go to the dusty old attic and rummage in the big box. There, over in the corner are some 'Godey's Lady's Books,' with fashion plates in them. Just take what you want and go where you please afterward. There's no one on the place to see you, dear—and I—I guess Mama wants to forgive you first, for whispering?" she added, noting the wistful, backward glance of the sensitive and grieving child.

And Selina went to the stair and kissed her into radiant happiness, and no more was seen or heard of May that day, save when she was positively ordered to the table for food.

"Dear Mrs. Marsh," asked Hulda, as they gathered up the heap of work already cut out, and moved toward the wide, cool entry to settle themselves to their sewing, "don't be vexed at my freedom, but why are you so very exacting with that little thing? She is such a gentle child; why are you so severe?"

"Why?" repeated Selina, with flushing face and a flash of the eye. "Why? because she has to live in other people's houses—because I have to work for my living, and a strange child, always unwelcome, may only be tolerated in the house as a very paragon of silent obedience! That's why the rod is always so close to my hand! It's not exactly a joyous life that is led by the mother of the unwelcome child," ended Selina, with a bitter smile.

And Mrs. Hollister, leaning back in her chair, pressed both hands to her temples and exclaimed: "You, too? dear God! you, too? Why, Mrs. Marsh, every bite of food my boy takes is counted, every miserable garment he wears is made rough with curses! We work unceasingly, like slaves, but what of that? My own father makes a mock of us—proclaims us 'drag and burden,' and all this misery is caused by——"

She paused, and Selina completed the sentence: "The perfidy of a man!"

And Hulda, looking with hot, bright eyes at her, questioned: "And your own sorrow?"

And again and more bitterly, Selina repeated: "The perfidy of a man!"

At which both women broke into dreary laughter—then for a long time they worked with a silent, fierce intensity. But speech was boiling up toward Hulda's long-sealed lips, and presently in a muffled voice, she said: "Your lot is hard, but you are not shamed like me. Think, my child is called 'the Brat,' as if"—(passionately) "as if he were a bastard!"

"You are mistaken," replied Selina, dully. "You do not know what shame is! But I—who am the wife of a bigamist do—for, in the eyes of the law my child *is* a bastard!"

With a cry of pity, Hulda caught the woman's hands and pressed her cheek to them, and then with a rush she began to speak.

CHAPTER VIII

The Man with the White Hat

“It is your comprehending sympathy that is rolling away the stone of sixteen years’ silence from the sepulcher of my heart. Oh, the joy of once more feeling a touch of the pity that is not contemptuous, of knowing that even though you may condemn my judgment you will still appreciate the unselfishness of my intention in that dread time of trial, when there was none to advise. I am not going to tell you of the old, old story, that is ever new and always interesting—but of the old, old tragedy that is never new and never interesting to any one but its victim ‘The Tragedy of Married Love Betrayed.’

“My father is a bigot and a miser—my husband was an atheist and a spendthrift. Between them they have turned me into this” (with a contemptuous gesture, she swept her hand downward from brow to toe). “Taunted, jeered, all day I toil like a slave, and half the night prostrate before the throne, I pray God to protect my boy from the influence of his father on one side, and from that of his grandfather on the other—that dread influence of the blood in our veins that is stronger than training, stronger than reason, stronger than anything

save God's mercy! You have not seen my father yet, have you? I thought not. But you have heard of him, I am very sure—have heard him called 'Old Skin-flint Toler.' Don't flush, mere conventional politeness is not highly esteemed in this region, and I am sorry to say Father has earned his nickname. He is irascible and disputatious. He has been at variance with every farmer of the country-side. He is continually in litigation over some trifling matter. Just one person in this world has had the power to open his close-clenched fist, and that was my mother. It took the mightiest effort of her life to secure for me a sort of education, and, so long as we both shall live, Father will never cease to cast into my face that monstrous waste of precious money.

"Mrs. Marsh, if ever there was a random marriage, that marriage was mine. Father, with the amiable intention of frightening Mother by his imprudence, had gone to the city one day alone, driving his handsome young pacing stallion Wildfire. I had named the animal and I think that was the only thing I ever did that won Father's approval—though he often said that had he 'not been a professin' Christian, he would have called the horse Hell-fire!' Not that he was vicious—far from it—but being nervous, excitable and ambitious, he construed every possible sound or movement into a challenge of speed; while the sight of any unusual object on the roadside started him off in a

frantic struggle to get out of his own handsome, black skin. Mother begged him to take the old team, warning him of the effect city sights and sounds might have on Wildfire, but all in vain. She had purchased from a pedler a small bottle of flavoring extract of vanilla the day before, and though she had used her own butter and egg money, Father was simply furious with rage at the senseless extravagance, and vowed he was going to see his lawyer in Quincy and fix his money so that there 'couldn't be no extracts of nuthin' bought when he had gone harpin' up above!' He bitterly declared it to be his opinion, 'that she'd buy scented hair ile 'fore he was cold in his grave—if he didn't tie up his money so she couldn't'! And off he went, grinning maliciously at Mother's frightened face when Wildfire stood on end at the sudden emerging of a hissing old gander from the tall weeds by the fence.

"'Oh, my dear!' said Mother, when he had disappeared in a cloud of dust, 'that poor little bottle of essence has washed away the last hope of a melodeon for you to play on! No—don't say dulcimer, either! I couldn't get a jew's-harp out of him now!'

"And though I took as much of the work from her as I could, and sang 'The Land o' the Leal' to her as often as she wished, she had nevertheless worried herself into a nervous headache long before Father drove safely home in a most remarkably affable state of mind.

"A young man in Quincy 'had been struck all of a

heap,' he said, by the speed and beauty of Wildfire, and had tried to buy him, 'and Mother,' his eyes gleaming with fierce exultation, 'I'm dumgasted if he didn't offer me—offer me, mind yer, fifty dollars mor'n the highest price I ever sot on him!'

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“Like a suit of clothes,” swiftly assented Hulda.

And Selina added: “I, also, owe a heavy debt to a gracious manner—but go on.”

“Ah, well!” continued Hulda. “I may as well make the admission at once: Harry Hollister was a follower of the races and a sort of *dilettante* gambler. It followed naturally that sometimes he was in funds, sometimes not. His generosity was genuine, but of the erratic order. His gifts were ostentatious. He would toss me a jewel—when the crying needs of my worn garments were giving the wash-woman food for enjoyable gossip, an expensive fan or hat when I had not a whole shoe to my foot. At last I made the discovery—and oh, I was confounded, ashamed, abashed. My father, if a hard, a miserly man, is at least honest; and though not a Christian in the truest sense, he does mightily fear God and respects the Word; and I have drawn an unshakable faith from my patient mother’s very breast, yet there I was bound to an atheist and fattening on the folly and sin of my fellow creatures. Hopes, illusions, dreams—all went crashing into one great ruin when I knew myself to be the wife of a gambler!

“But worse was to come. We had our first quarrel when, with every evidence of pride and pleasure, my husband brought to my home and presented to me that notorious slayer of men, Ben Page. At the sound of the name I turned white; the words of welcome froze on my lips. My hand fell to my side, I could not clasp the fingers that were so familiar with the trigger of the revolver and the handle of the bowie-knife.

"Harry Hollister had to the full that reckless disregard for human life, so common with a certain type of Southerner. In his shallow mind the privileged classes were separated from the great common mass by a chasm at least several inches wider than the ocean. He saw no horror nor disgrace in the shedding of human blood so long as it was not done in an underhanded or cowardly manner—while to have fought a duel and dropped your man was as the accolade of knighthood. Therefore, Ben Page was in Harry Hollister's eyes a veritable hero, the personification of all that was intrepid and valorous.

"To me the man's smiling condescension was odious. He seemed a boastful, swaggering transgressor—more, a thing accursed! And Harry, angrily accusing me of incivility, charged it to my ill-breeding and the influence of that creed-bound old bigot and clodhopper, my father!

"When I admitted my belief that the law of the land was strong enough to right a man's wrongs or, at the worst, to avenge them, he sneeringly remarked: 'Allow me to inform you that the *genus* gentleman is not quite extinct—and I will add for your comfort that if any man gives me cause for offense, I'll take it out of that precious fluid you consider so sacred—his blood! Unless he's a coward—in that case it will come out of his hide!'

"Of course I considered such threats as mere angry

vaporings, inspired by a like amiable intention to that which had moved father to drive the excitable young horse—the desire to worry and frighten a timid wife.

“My life grew very lonely; my husband’s occupation prevented me from making friends. He neglected me more and more at the very time when my health required unusual care. Yet one joy I had to the full, books! Oh, how I reveled in them! That was the literary garden spot of my life. Since then books have been as unobtainable as the great North Star! But then—Harry had himself been fond of reading before—well, before he began to drink too much; and he provided me with books when at times there was little else in the house.

“Mother had barely kissed and welcomed my baby when Father’s growls and complaints drew her back, and—I never saw her again. An unsuspected weakness of the heart—over-exertion in washing the heavy blankets Father declared she could handle without help—and like a patient ox she fell in the yoke.”

Lifting wet eyes to Selina’s face, Hulda cried: “Do you know that next to the birth of my boy, the greatest joy of my life came from my husband’s gift to Mother. Such a little thing—just a simple gold pin, marked, ‘From Baby Eldred to Grandmother,’ but her passionate pleasure, her tremulous surprise, her unceasing anxiety for its safety, were positively tragic.

Think of it! she was a grandmother when she received her first, last and only ornament!

“Motherhood, often destructive to beauty—added greatly to mine. My coloring deepened, my figure matured. My husband’s admiration was newly aroused. He became jealous of our boy, of his many needs, of my devotion to them. His treatment of the child was most injudicious. He was proud of his beauty and intelligence, but there was something strangely aloof in the child’s manner at times—an ineffable purity in the steady blue-gray eyes that seemed to irritate Harry beyond endurance—indeed he treated his boy after the manner of some men with their dogs, a blow one moment and a bit of steak the next—truly a cruel and dangerous practice in either case.

“Eldred was well past his third birthday when Harry fell in with a particularly undesirable crowd of men. Night after night he came home the worse for liquor. As he grew quarrelsome at such times, I used to fear for his safety. One night he mentioned the fact that he had discovered in a policeman an old friend of the New Orleans days—the fellow, in fact, who had taken him to his first horse race, and given him his first glimpse of the green table. He seemed to feel great sympathy for the man’s fallen fortunes and looked upon his occupation as distinctly disgraceful.

“Not long afterward as I came home from a walk with my boy, I found my husband standing on the

steps, showing out a big, good-looking, smiling man—who was chatting volubly in French. What's the matter, Mrs. Marsh—rested your hand on a needle? Oh, I'm sorry! Yes, I could see Harry's pleasure in having some one to practise his French on. He showed a quite childish vanity in airing his accomplishment. He did not present me—but the big man took off his hat with a graceful sweep and in passing shot such a blazing look of admiration into my eyes that I knew myself scarlet to my very brows, and I carefully averted my face, that my husband might notice nothing.

“The stranger, he said, was an agent for a big whisky firm in Canada somewhere—Why, did you prick yourself again? Put that work off your lap—and those scissors, too.

“About a week after that, my husband literally forced me to go to a ball with him. Had he been quite clear-headed, I am sure he would not have taken his wife to a public affair, where for five dollars almost any one might enter. Vexed and mortified, I dressed for the evening, and at my appearance in our sitting-room, Harry cried: ‘Good God! to think I found you growing at the roadside among the very weeds! Hulda, you're a beauty!’

“It's hard to believe now, Mrs. Marsh, but at eighteen I used to be called, as Amabel Stanway is to-day, the prettiest girl in the county.”

“Any one who has seen your son can believe that

easily enough," broke in Selina, and Hulda's worn face flushed all over with pleasure at the words.

She went on: "Of course, Harry's praise partly dispelled my annoyance and during the early part of the evening I confess I enjoyed myself."

Selina Marsh, who had been slowly and laboriously doing a little sum in mental arithmetic, trying to find out how many years sixteen from—well, say forty, would leave, had reached the conclusion that twenty-four or twenty-five was about the right figure, and unwarily asked: "Did the young French-Canadian appear at the ball?"

"Oh, if he had not! if he had not!" groaned Mrs. Hollister. Then, suddenly: "But what a wonderful woman you are to divine things! I am certain I did not tell you in so many words he was quite young, and I do not know that he was a Canadian—only that he was an agent for a Canadian business house. My husband must have taken considerable wine to have forgotten my horror of Ben Page—at all events he brought him up to me and asked a waltz for him. I coldly announced my card filled. Harry was enraged. He snatched the tiny program from my hand and crossed out his own name, saying, 'If you won't dance with my friend, you can't dance with me.' He was turning away when he suddenly encountered the French-speaking stranger and catching him by the arm, he cried, 'Ah, not dancing? Then perhaps you will

fill my place on madam's card—since circumstances of her own creation prevent me from filling my several engagements,' and with a malicious laugh he presented the man and disappeared."

"And the name?" prompted Selina, "the name was?"

"I don't remember perfectly, or rather I do not feel sure that I ever understood it correctly—still it sounded like Revalle or Savalle," but to Selina a small voice was saying, very positively saying: "Lavalle—Charles Paul Lavalle is the name. But oh, good heaven! did he never weary of the game—never?"

"Remembering that first bold glance I was frightened as well as shamed at being thrown thus into his hands, but he was most respectful, most deferential in his manner. He did not even claim the waltz my husband had abandoned to him—for out here, Mrs. Marsh a man may dance with his wife without outraging the proprieties. He gave me up gravely and courteously to my next partner, but at the end of the dance he appeared to claim me, explaining that I was in his care, by my husband's wish. He was entertaining. The anger in my heart turned wholly against my husband who had put this humiliation upon me. I became grateful to the smiling, gracious young man who took no advantage of my cruel position. I walked through a square dance with him. I saw he was a good dancer" (Selina smiled), "and I gave him just the end of the next waltz. Good heaven! I had thought Harry a

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delightful partner, but this man waltzed like an angel, strength and skill concealed by grace and rhythm. He toiled not, but he seemed to float about supporting me without effort.

"I went to supper with him—alas! there I encountered the blazing look in his eyes again. I saw my husband at a distance—he was still with Page. I signaled him—he pretended not to see me. I made up my mind to leave the place alone—to go home, if I could escape from this man. Near the stairway leading to the cloak-room was a small, poorly stocked conservatory, opening upon a balcony. Here I walked about for a little, trying, trying to rid myself for one moment of my tormentor that I might dash upstairs for my wraps.

"He was making open love to me—denouncing my husband's infamous neglect. I commanded silence, and he told me I could purchase it with the red japonica I wore at my breast.

"'A married woman does not give flowers, sir! If you are a gentleman, you will leave me at once,' I answered him. His face was flushed, his manner recklessly bold. I was frightened, but tried to treat the matter lightly by adding, 'The flower is only silk—one does not give artificial blossoms.'

"'It has been burning like fire against your white breast all evening, and I must have it! So give or—'

He suddenly threw his arm about my waist and laughed down in my face—‘or I will take——’

“I gave a cry. Some one tore the man from me. In a moment there was a crowd in the room. I saw Page wrench the pistol from my husband’s hand: ‘Not here, the man’s not armed!’ he said very quietly, and turning to me, he added: ‘Get your cloak.’

“Revalle was at least not a coward. He nodded toward the weapon: ‘I don’t carry that sort of thing!’ he smiled, ‘But I’ve got my fists—come outside!’

“I was down stairs in a second. Page and a couple of friends quickly circled around us. As we moved to the door, Harry turned and said to Revalle: ‘I’ll shoot you on sight—remember!’

“He left me at the door of our home. Some time in the early morning he came in and changed his clothes. He drank all the day with his ‘gang,’ as he called them. Early in the night he entered a bar-room. Two men were chatting in French over a table. The grammatical blunders of the one were making much amusement for the other, who was Revalle. He rose as the party entered. Harry saw him, drew and fired. At that same instant the second man rising from the table received the shot.

“As he fell to the floor, Page exclaimed: ‘The wrong man, by God!’

“Revalle, kneeling, with his hand on the stricken

man's heart, turned and said swiftly: 'He's dead—get out quick! *quick!*'

"Page gave him an approving glance and the quick affirmative of his class, 'Right!' and turned to Harry, standing dazed by his awful blunder. The barkeeper was rushing from the saloon, calling for the police. Harry, hustled out by his party, ran directly upon the policeman responding to the call—but it was his friend from the South.

"With lightning swiftness Page explained in six words: 'Wife insulted—dropped the wrong man!'

"The policeman noticed in a flash Harry's panama hat, unusual headgear in that city, and said under his breath: 'Change hats—and run! This isn't New Orleans!' Then loudly and apparently breathlessly, cried: 'What's wrong here? Shooting—man dead? Who did it? what? run—catch that man!' himself breaking into a race after the men still in sight. One fellow turned aside to follow Harry, as he dashed into an alley, but the policeman yelled: 'The white hat—follow the white hat!' 'That's the man! catch him!' And Ben Page, who had clapped Harry's white hat upon his own head, with clenched hands and elbows close to his sides, ran his best to lead the chase as far as possible away from the house, where he knew the quarry would seek shelter.

"So when next I saw my husband—beaten, breathless, wild-eyed—doubly locking the doors and motion-

ing me to extinguish the light lest his shadow be cast upon the curtains, I knew—knew before on his knees, with his burning head upon my breast, he told me of his wild shot and its terrible result. And I thanked God for the darkness, that he might not see with what loathing I shrank from him.

“And while we still talked, a little gravel cast against the window startled us. ‘Go down!’ said Harry, ‘and unfasten the door. Leave it ajar—but make no light yet,’ and in a little while soft steps came up the stairs.

“It was Page. We went to a rear room and lighted the lamp. Calmly, clearly, rapidly he spoke: ‘The man killed was a well-known and popular citizen. Already people were enraged. The whole city would be up in arms in a few hours. Warrants—arrest—imprisonment would follow!’

“‘But,’ argued Harry, ‘I was resenting an insult to my wife!’

“Page shook his head. ‘That won’t do here, Hollister. We are too far North—and then you happened to get a pretty good man. You will have to jump and look sharp about it—for—’ Harry was looking at me and hesitating and Page added: ‘Strong, the policeman, has handcuffs in his pocket for you now.’

“With a cry of rage Harry bounded to his feet. He who found no disgrace in the shedding of blood considered the touch of handcuffs a degradation—to be

avoided by death if necessary. So he became obedient in a moment.

“‘You usually wear light colors,’ said Page, ‘so, Mrs. Hollister, get out some dark clothing.’ While Harry changed, his friend looked to revolver and pocket-book.

“‘But that beast?’ groaned my husband. ‘Is he to escape?’

“‘He turned my face toward Page and continued: ‘Any man on earth would know that a pure and an honest woman! Oh, damn him! Page! Page! I—can’t go! his vile hand was at her neck! I believe I’d break out of hell—if I thought that man was going to escape paying for the insult of his touch! Say, Page, will you?’

“‘Yes,’ Page nodded, ‘he shall pay! only get away from here. Strong is keeping off you as long as he can, and your only chance is to slip across the river in a small boat—before the hue and cry reaches the river people! Hurry now!’

“‘Harry took me in his arms and holding me tight, devoured me with his eyes: ‘I’ve not been a good husband—I’ve thrown you into temptation often! That you resisted was no credit to me. If I get away—clear off, I’ll send for you and the boy—and I’ll be a better husband to you, Hulda! But if I fail—you know, dear! I’ll punch my own ticket before I’ll be disgraced by bracelets, like a nigger razor-slasher or a horse-thief!

And in that case, Hulda, my poor wife—you'll have to take the boy and go back to your father—for I—I've run in a bad streak of luck for nearly a year, and there's not a dollar in hand! Oh, Hulda! Hulda! kiss me once more and try and forgive me! And don't forget me entirely in the boy!

"He was forcibly dragged away, and I sat there with the lamp burning pale in the full light of day, when Page staggered in and fell his length upon the sofa. I knew I was a widow, just as well before as after he had spoken. He told me that as they had neared the opposite side of the river an armed posse of men sprang up: 'Here he is!' cried one, 'I know him! Officer, get out yer handcuffs! Put up that gun, Bill, there's been too much shootin' in this town lately! We're goin' to carry this thing through by process of law! Arrest that man for murder!'

"Harry rose—stood, one foot on the edge of the open boat. 'Mind you don't forget that insult!' he said, and the report of his pistol was instantly followed by the splash of his body in the water.

"Down here it was supposed that we were living steadily in Quincy. I slipped back to that city and wrote from there to Father, that Harry was in dangerous company, and had made enemies. Of course I expected no answer. The papers copied the news of the shooting and suicide in a sister city, but no one here took a paper then—few do now. In another week

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CHAPTER IX

“ *Where’s that Brat?* ”

“If Zachary Toler grieved over the loss of his wife, my poor mother, he certainly gave no outward expression to the feeling,” continued Mrs. Hollister. “Though he did complain that death had become twice as expensive as it had been when his mother and father had died—though he admitted that being buried together, victims of some sort of cholera morbus, the ‘expense of a single funeral might about covered the cost of the double one.’ But when he had been forced to hire a woman to come in and cook and sew for him, and keep the house in some sort of order, he wailed aloud!

“He even wrote to me, to give vent to some of his disgust and anger; and he declared there should be some law framed ‘ter protect the widowers from she-wolves of housekeepers! And he was gumdasted, if it wasn’t criminal for an old skeesicks of a woman ter come inter yer house—have free lodgin’, stuff herself with your vittals, and then, by gum, want actual money for a few hand-turns ’round the kitchen or spreadin’ up yer bed! Payin’ money out to a critter that sets down and rocks a pan of peas, while she’s shellin’ of ’em! Mirandy didn’t do her work in no

rockin’ chair! And the waste! Great Creator of us all! the waste! Why she chucked the tea inter the pot like it was common stink-weed! And she never once looked after the strippin’s of the cows—and any fool knew that the strippin’s from six cows meant somethin’! And, doggone her, she smoked all day and went ’round droppin’ pipe ashes inter everythin’, johnnie-cake included! And then wanted to be *paid* for it! To think how he and Mirandy had worked, only to be brought to the poor-house by a blood-suckin’, old housekeepin’, pipe-smoker—that didn’t do a good day’s work in a month about the house an’ as for an early litter of expensive pigs or an ailin’ lamb—she wouldn’t lift er finger ter keep the hull passel from dyin’ on yer!’

“Remembering all this, Mrs. Marsh, it was with a modest degree of confidence that I ventured back home, honestly believing that my services as cook, seamstress, housemaid and outdoor help would pay for the keep of my boy and myself—until the lad also could help his grandfather, and knowing one-half the sum paid to the housekeeper would provide for us the coarse and simple garments made necessary by the rigor of the climate and the law of the land. But, oh, that reception! never will the pain and shame of it fade from my memory! The cruelty, the coarse brutality of his words and actions! I had always known him to be irascible and close to the verge of miserliness—but I

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fill my place on madam's card—since circumstances of her own creation prevent me from filling my several engagements,' and with a malicious laugh he presented the man and disappeared."

"And the name?" prompted Selina, "the name was?"

"I don't remember perfectly, or rather I do not feel sure that I ever understood it correctly—still it sounded like Revalle or Savalle," but to Selina a small voice was saying, very positively saying: "Lavalle—Charles Paul Lavalle is the name. But oh, good heaven! did he never weary of the game—never?"

"Remembering that first bold glance I was frightened as well as shamed at being thrown thus into his hands, but he was most respectful, most deferential in his manner. He did not even claim the waltz my husband had abandoned to him—for out here, Mrs. Marsh a man may dance with his wife without outraging the proprieties. He gave me up gravely and courteously to my next partner, but at the end of the dance he appeared to claim me, explaining that I was in his care, by my husband's wish. He was entertaining. The anger in my heart turned wholly against my husband who had put this humiliation upon me. I became grateful to the smiling, gracious young man who took no advantage of my cruel position. I walked through a square dance with him. I saw he was a good dancer" (Selina smiled), "and I gave him just the end of the next waltz. Good heaven! I had thought Harry a



delightful partner, but this man waltzed like an angel, strength and skill concealed by grace and rhythm. He toiled not, but he seemed to float about supporting me without effort.

"I went to supper with him—alas! there I encountered the blazing look in his eyes again. I saw my husband at a distance—he was still with Page. I signaled him—he pretended not to see me. I made up my mind to leave the place alone—to go home, if I could escape from this man. Near the stairway leading to the cloak-room was a small, poorly stocked conservatory, opening upon a balcony. Here I walked about for a little, trying, trying to rid myself for one moment of my tormentor that I might dash upstairs for my wraps.

"He was making open love to me—denouncing my husband's infamous neglect. I commanded silence, and he told me I could purchase it with the red japonica I wore at my breast.

"‘A married woman does not give flowers, sir! If you are a gentleman, you will leave me at once,’ I answered him. His face was flushed, his manner recklessly bold. I was frightened, but tried to treat the matter lightly by adding, ‘The flower is only silk—one does not give artificial blossoms.’

"‘It has been burning like fire against your white breast all evening, and I must have it! So give or—’

He suddenly threw his arm about my waist and laughed down in my face—‘or I will take——’

“I gave a cry. Some one tore the man from me. In a moment there was a crowd in the room. I saw Page wrench the pistol from my husband’s hand: ‘Not here, the man’s not armed!’ he said very quietly, and turning to me, he added: ‘Get your cloak.’

“Revalle was at least not a coward. He nodded toward the weapon: ‘I don’t carry that sort of thing!’ he smiled, ‘But I’ve got my fists—come outside!’

“I was down stairs in a second. Page and a couple of friends quickly circled around us. As we moved to the door, Harry turned and said to Revalle: ‘I’ll shoot you on sight—remember!’

“He left me at the door of our home. Some time in the early morning he came in and changed his clothes. He drank all the day with his ‘gang,’ as he called them. Early in the night he entered a bar-room. Two men were chatting in French over a table. The grammatical blunders of the one were making much amusement for the other, who was Revalle. He rose as the party entered. Harry saw him, drew and fired. At that same instant the second man rising from the table received the shot.

“As he fell to the floor, Page exclaimed: ‘The wrong man, by God!’

“Revalle, kneeling, with his hand on the stricken

man's heart, turned and said swiftly: 'He's dead—get out quick! *quick!*'

"Page gave him an approving glance and the quick affirmative of his class, 'Right!' and turned to Harry, standing dazed by his awful blunder. The barkeeper was rushing from the saloon, calling for the police. Harry, hustled out by his party, ran directly upon the policeman responding to the call—but it was his friend from the South.

"With lightning swiftness Page explained in six words: 'Wife insulted—dropped the wrong man!'

"The policeman noticed in a flash Harry's panama hat, unusual headgear in that city, and said under his breath: 'Change hats—and run! This isn't New Orleans!' Then loudly and apparently breathlessly, cried: 'What's wrong here? Shooting—man dead? Who did it? what? run—catch that man!' himself breaking into a race after the men still in sight. One fellow turned aside to follow Harry, as he dashed into an alley, but the policeman yelled: 'The white hat—follow the white hat!' 'That's the man! catch him!' And Ben Page, who had clapped Harry's white hat upon his own head, with clenched hands and elbows close to his sides, ran his best to lead the chase as far as possible away from the house, where he knew the quarry would seek shelter.

"So when next I saw my husband—beaten, breathless, wild-eyed—doubly locking the doors and motion-

ing me to extinguish the light lest his shadow be cast upon the curtains, I knew—knew before on his knees, with his burning head upon my breast, he told me of his wild shot and its terrible result. And I thanked God for the darkness, that he might not see with what loathing I shrank from him.

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“Remembering all this, Mrs. Marsh, it was with a modest degree of confidence that I ventured back home, honestly believing that my services as cook, seamstress, housemaid and outdoor help would pay for the keep of my boy and myself—until the lad also could help his grandfather, and knowing one-half the sum paid to the housekeeper would provide for us the coarse and simple garments made necessary by the rigor of the climate and the law of the land. But, oh, that reception! never will the pain and shame of it fade from my memory! The cruelty, the coarse brutality of his words and actions! I had always known him to be irascible and close to the verge of miserliness—but I

had never guessed the extent of Mother's power over him, had not realized that she was an almost constant brake upon the outward expression of the cruel and malicious temper he curbed before her steady eyes—and in the years since her death he had deteriorated, he had abandoned all self-control.

“He was a man with a heavy hand and a hard heart, covetous and avaricious, and when he found I had come back empty-handed his rage was dreadful. He called my husband, ‘cheat, mountebank and jack-a-dandy’—and when I asked him to spare the dead, he made answer: ‘Dead? shucks! we hear enough. He’s lit out to get shet’er you and the Brat! When yer show me ther receipt for a grave-space in some buryin’ ground plot down ter Quincy, I’ll bergin to believe Hal Hollister’s turned up his toes! Can’t do that? Course yer can’t—didn’t ’spose yer could!’

“‘Father,’ I said, ‘he is not the first man that has been gotten rid of by the bad crowd that hovers around the race-course, like so many carrion crows, or by the still more dangerous black-legs and card-sharps who ply their trade on the river steamers. He had made enemies of these last—I knew and I wrote and told you so. Don’t you remember how worried I was because he was carrying a pistol for self-protection? And then with an unfinished letter on his desk, his clothing hanging about on their pegs, he went out

confessedly for an evening at cards and—that was the end.'

"'The police sought him in vain, and, Father, they were the first to put into words the fear that was in my heart. They believe my husband was killed for the money, watch and diamond he carried—besides,' I asked, 'what motive could he have had in merely disappearing?'"

"'Motive?' snapped Father, 'motive enough, ter git rid and tetotally shet of a woman he'd got tired of, and ther expense of bringin' up his youn'-un! He jes' thinks it durned smart ter play off dead and let his widder an' orphant fasten onter me like a couple of blood-suckin' leeches!'"

"'Father,' I pleaded, 'I shall be self-supporting. I'll do twice the work for you Mrs. Gaine does!'"

"'An' what of that boy?' snarled he. 'Growin' bigger an' eatin' more every week of his useless life! An' you can jes' strip them shoes an' stockings offen his feet, quicker'n lightnin', if he's goin' ter sponge a livin' offen me!'"

Selina smiled at that demand with a brand-new comprehension of certain glowering looks that had been cast at May's foot-wear.

"'Wal, I ain't havin' the wool pulled over my eyes, Huldy! You can turn in and work for yer keep—but that brat of hissen, I'll jes' make out my bill for his grub an' duds, an' whenever er wherever that

jack-a-dandy, fine and bright husband of yours—that's shook yer both—turns up, I'll hav' it paid in full, or I'll hav' the law of him!' And to this very day, Father makes out a bill yearly for the poor dead man to settle.

"Oh, yes, I have seen the wonder in your eyes, Mrs. Marsh. I read now the question on your lips: Why have I deceived Father as to my husband's actual death? Why have I accepted the humiliating position of a supposedly deserted wife—with all its accompanying disrespect and neglect? and I answer, I have done it for my boy's sake. Oh, Mrs. Marsh, think! think! 'Bloody men shall not live out half their days!' 'Who sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed!' and worst of all, 'The Lord will abhor the bloody man!'

"Words of Holy Writ, all of them—dreadful words! Add to them the mystery of heredity and the child's imitative habit, then recall my husband's deed, the poor flimsy excuse for it—and tell me if you still wonder that at any cost under heaven to myself, I tried to hide from my son that his father's hands were stained with blood! He might shrink with righteous horror from the knowledge, or again, to the Hollister blood in him, it might seem a matter of pride, an example to be followed—a belief that would probably develope in him a dictatorial and quarrelsome temper! Remember too that I knew these people well; knew

that my father would have driven me from his door, as one accursed, had he believed me the widow of a blood-guilty man; knew that every one in the settlement would look down with contempt upon Eldred as the son of a suicide. So, however stricken, helpless, confused—on my very knees at prayer, this plan came to me—to declare the disappearance and probable death of Harry. In case of Father investigating the story, which was not likely to happen, I did go to the police. They made some perfunctory inquiries and assured me Hal had been done away with by thugs. Then, as God did not strike me down, as I used to half expect, for the lie that came to me at prayer, I put it into action for my boy’s sake, and brazen as it may seem to you, I still kneel and pray—but always for him, never for myself, since my great and deliberate lie.

“Father publicly cast doubt upon my husband’s death, and those who had begun by treating me with some consideration as a widow, ended with contemptuous neglect, of a woman who’d been left by her husband. Father also set the example of referring to Eldred as ‘Huldy’s Brat.’ He would promise to send over this or that by Huldy’s Brat, or he would boast of the ‘lickin’ he’d give to that brat of Huldy’s.’

“And my boy—oh, God! oh, God! the life Eldred has led! He was a rather silent, very thoughtful child—full of imagination. Ready to respect his elders and obey them, yet I have caught a glimpse now and then

of strong will, when his grandfather had been unjust to him. His pretty manners seemed to irritate Father dreadfully: 'Golldurned, useless little cub, eatin' my vittals and bowin' and sirring, as if he mout be a gentleman!' he would growl. Nothing suited him. If Dred sat on the step and watched with bated breath the movements of a toad catching flies—Grandfather Toler raged at his uselessness. If I tied an apron about him and, standing him on a creepie, let him help wash and wipe the cups and saucers and spoons—he would jeer at the child, calling him 'Cissie!' and 'Great calf!'

"Eldred had never been in the country before and the poetry of nature thrilled him to the very heart. Had it not been for my father the child's life would have been ecstasy. He was never lonely. The trees, the plants, the birds, the animals were his companions. That old, nearly dead, butternut out there was from the first his 'raggedy-man,' and the trumpet-creeper, then only a young vine sporting three or four blossoms, was the raggedy-man's little girl. Great clouds, rolling up big with storm, he would greet with glowing eyes, and waving his arms, he would cry to them: 'Here, make the rain spill down here, please!' Then wild with delight, he would rush to me crying: 'They heard me, Mother!—see! see!' Then he would listen to the patter of the drops and knitting his brows would try to catch 'the tune,' he declared they played

on the low roof or the massed leaves. The thing that troubled him the most was the wind. What was it?—where did it live? Why couldn’t he see it—when he could feel it? Sometimes, he said, it played with little bits of things, and some other times it shook the whole house, and ‘please, Mother, what happened to make it get angry like that?’

“Let me show you just how observant those steady, blue-gray eyes of his were in his little boyhood days. I must tell you first, Father always asks a blessing at table, and shortly after we came here Eldred said to me: ‘Mother, do you suppose God likes it when Grandpa asks angry blessings, that mean swears?’”

“Ah!” exclaimed Selina, “It’s a wonder the boy has not learned to loathe religion!”

“Oh!” cried Hulda, “how I have striven to prevent that. As a little fellow he had never been whipped. He was very amenable to the wishes of his elders. True, his father had shaken him, had even boxed his ears once or twice, but nothing more. But one day, when Eldred, not knowing his grandfather was within hearing distance, was telling me the wonders he had seen that day, of the frog he had held in his very own hands, who had a for-true white vest on and green speckled trousers and coat and such a mouth! oh, my, such a mouth! and he had put him back in the mud. ‘And—and, oh, Mother! do you know,’ he cried,

excitedly, 'that every single green peach has on a dear little whity-gray petticoat!'

"'Thar! that's enough lyin' for one day, you consarned little hound!' shouted Father. He sprang into the kitchen, and caught the frightened child by the arm. 'I'll lick the lyin' out of you, or I'll lick the life outen yer!'

"'Father! Father!' I screamed. 'The boy is not lying. He means the down on the peach—it is like a little coat or petticoat. Dred has never told a real lie in his life!'

"He flung me back into the room, as he swung the child out of the door: 'Frogs wear vests, too, don't they!' he sneered, and in a moment more I heard the blows of the whip falling on that tender little body. Oh, I can't bear to recall it even now! As I held his quivering frame in my arms there was a look in his eyes that terrified me! My tears fell fast as I bathed the cruel weals that circled the small bare legs—but though great sobs shook him, his eyes were dry and the look in them was less of terror than of hate.

"After that for at least two or three years the boy's body was seldom free from the bruise or welt that illustrated Father's churlish tempers. Had Dred been the most depraved and vicious of boys he could not have been more severely dealt with—yet the blows did not hurt as much as the injustice of them.

"By his own forgetfulness, Father left the bars down

one day. Little Dred, finding them so, ran to seek his grandfather and tell him the cows were coming out. The old man punished him at once for not putting up the bars himself—only to find a half-hour later that their weight was far beyond his small strength to lift. And when a neighbor who had failed to return the borrowed laudanum bottle, sent it back by Dred, with the warning skull-and-cross-bones label nearly rubbed from it, he took the whip to the unfortunate boy, declaring he had removed the label, in the hope that his grandfather might some time swallow the contents, instead of simply putting it in the poultice for his boil. ‘Consarn you!’ he cried, at every blow. ‘You’d like me ter swaller that stuff and sleep to death—wouldn’t yer!’

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with kisses, saying over and over: 'Did you miss me, Seek? Did you truly miss me?'

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"And Eldred stooped and raising the trembling puppy in his arms, he repeated with a ring of passion in his voice, 'You will never strike my dog again!'

"A while after I stole out with a cup of milk and a morsel of meat for the dog, and I found my boy, lying full length, crying as if his heart would break,

and Seek whimpering and kissing his face and hands in a sort of terrified frenzy of love. 'Oh, thank you, Mother! thank you!' said Dred, and drying his eyes on his sleeve, boy fashion, he coaxed his pet to eat and drink. 'Mother,' he added, 'it was my turn to keep meat for him to-day, but will you do it, too? I—I—you see, well, I want him to be very happy just for the rest of to-day,' and he came close and whispered, 'Mother, oh, please! please let him sleep with me just this one single time in all the world? *He* won't know' (glancing toward the barn). 'Mother, please! Seek must be very, very happy to-night—he must, Mother—truly he must!'

'I thought I understood and I whispered back, 'We will try, dear!—but it must only be for this one night!' and was amazed to feel the storm of sobs that suddenly shook him from head to foot.

'Later he romped and raced and exerted himself in every way to make Seek happy. Now and then he caught him and kissed his eyes and head. He fairly gorged the dog at supper, 'Have you had enough—really and truly enough, for once?' he asked. He went to bed early. When I was preparing to go upstairs, I heard Dred's voice saying low, 'Poor Seek! here eat this! that's nicer, isn't it? Oh, Seek! Seek! what shall I do?'

'I loitered a while down stairs, fearing that if I went up then, the dog would give me a noisy wel-

come, and be thrown out of doors by Father in consequence. When I did at last creep into our room, Dred lay in bed, little Seek sleeping in his arms. I knelt to say my nightly prayer for my boy, and I wondered a little at the extreme quiet of the dog—who did not open his eyes, even when I passed my hand over his silky head—where Dred immediately pressed his cheek jealously. In the early dawn I rose—Dred still held Seek in his arms. My heart gave a startled plunge. He, apparently, had never moved. As I bent over them, Dred opened his eyes—his lips quivered piteously. 'I did it,' he said—he kissed the stiff little body tenderly—'He can't ever be hurt any more, Mother—and he was very happy here with us—he was. It was laudanum—and he slept and slept, and he never knew—but—but' (he buried his head in the pillow), 'but I knew!'

"I had taken breakfast from the table, when Father snarled, 'Where's that brat of yourn, Huldry? He's got ter com' ter his meals or go without. Eh? what?'

"Dred came in and laid the little dead dog before him. 'I told you, you would never strike him again!' he said, staring straight into Father's face.

"'W—what done it?' he asked, confusedly.

"'I did it,' the child answered, and Mrs. Marsh, as I looked down into his steady eyes, I thought I saw an awful thing. He had killed his dog for love—but

down in his very heart, he was killing his grandfather for hate!

"Oh, no! no!" exclaimed Selina. "Your dread of an inherited tendency has made you morbid, Mrs. Hollister! I'm sure you did your boy an injustice!"

"Do you think so?" questioned the poor woman, nervously clasping and unclasping her toil-worn hands, "I—I hope you are right—but, Mrs. Marsh, I saw murder in a man's eyes when he cried to Lavalley, 'I'll shoot you on sight—remember!' and" (with a shudder) "it's not a look that you forget. However, from that morning, Father never struck Eldred another blow, and for a time we rejoiced greatly—never dreaming that a day was coming when the lad would have been glad to endure daily thrashings, rather than the cruel and far-reaching punishment Father's malice had devised.

"From his very infancy, Dred had had a certain loving appreciation of books. He used to run about patting the cover of one and crying: 'The boy and the cat live in here!' Then stroking another, he would add: 'The pretty lady and the good robber-man, Robin-Hood, live in this one, don't they, Mama?'

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going to be bigger than Mama, and I'm going to have all the books in the world!

"Oh, poor boy! All bright children are inquisitive—eager to find out, but little Dred wanted to know the 'why' and 'wherefore' of the thing after he had found it out. His imagination was over active. The night sky had an undying fascination for him. He would sit on the step and watch for the first faint twinkle in the blue. Then he would go out in the darkness and lie on his back in the grass and gaze upward at the sea of glory. Once he asked in an awed tone: 'Mother, do you think the stars wash up against God's big white throne?' and I could only answer: 'Perhaps, dear.'"

CHAPTER X

Old Man Toler Plans Mischief

Hulda, intent on supper, had gone to the kitchen to light a fire. Selina was shaking out and neatly folding the coarse undergarments the two women had been making, when a "hallo!" from the road attracted her attention. Calling Mrs. Hollister, she was about to resume her folding when her hostess begged her to go out to the gate and meet the couple waiting there. So presently, Mrs. Marsh was being introduced to young Cy Toler, grandnephew of Old Man Toler, and to his companion, Essie Brown, a pretty, foolish little thing, about seventeen, who held a baby in her arms.

After some general remarks about weather and the forwardness or backwardness of farm work, Cy, with broad grins of satisfaction, came to the business in hand. The minister that rode the circuit two years ago was coming down here in a few weeks' time, and he and Essie would be married then; and her folks would give a blow-out and a dance very likely—and as sort of relations, Mrs. Hollister and the Br—er'—Dred were wanted, and—(he hesitated and glanced at Essie, who poked him with her elbow and jerked her head toward Selina, whereupon he continued), and if

Mrs. Marsh would accept an invite, they all would be mighty pleased, and he reckoned the Gallaways would come, "though Kate and Mother Brown warn't any too thick."

Mrs. Marsh thanked them and said if her sister accepted, she would be glad to accompany her. Mrs. Hollister asked how Mrs. Brown ~~was~~ this spring, and Essie answered, "Pretty well, only kinder used up with the baby's teethin'."

"Oh," asked Mrs. Marsh, "is your baby sis——" but a cough from Hulda and a warning pressure of her foot gave her pause and she hurriedly excused herself to go and look after May.

In a few moments Hulda came in, and Selina asked, "What was it—what did I do?"

Hulda reddened, bit her lip and then answered: "You were making a mistake, that's all. That baby is not Essie's sister, but her own child."

Selina stared and exclaimed, surprisedly: "What? A widow at her age? why she can't be eighteen?"

"No," said Hulda, wearily, "she's not seventeen and she is no widow—pray God she may soon be a wife—now!"

Selina dropped into the nearest chair: "But—their—manner? I don't understand."

"No, I suppose not. This must be dreadfully shocking to a stranger, the more so, when I tell you that it is not an exceptional case. Yet this condition of affairs

is not the result of sheer vice, as you may hastily conclude. It is brought about by propinquity; the absolute freedom of young people from all restraining conventionalities, and by the difficulties that cluster about the marriage ceremony. Then, too, such laxity is greatly encouraged by the attitude of nearly the whole settlement. The girl in the case does not suffer in either standing or character, so long as the man remains loyal. People say they are going to be married as soon as they can, every one knows that the marriage ceremony is anticipated, that's all. Why, this girl, Essie Brown, is to-day more highly considered than I am, as a supposedly deserted wife."

"But what prevents their marriage at the proper time?" demanded Selina, still bewildered.

"We have no church near; there is no minister at hand. We are supposed to be visited once or, on rare occasions, twice a year, by a traveling preacher, but it has happened that two years have passed without a visit. Then these people are very poor. They live on small clearings, or they work some one's place on shares. They have absolutely no money to travel with; they have no stock, no horses, or they might drive to the city, if they had a fee saved up, and be married there. So they calmly wait for Mahomet to come to the mountain. Why, one very popular woman living now down in 'the bottoms' had two little children

looking on delightedly at the festivities attending the marriage of their father and mother."

"Oh, it's dreadful!" cried Selina. "That poor girl to have fallen so low, almost in childhood! Her mother must have been wickedly careless!"

"My dear Mrs. Marsh," hastily broke in Hulda, "for mercy's sake! don't speak to any one else, in that tone, of Essie Brown. Remember her conduct is sanctioned here by custom and even your own sister, years ago——" Again Hulda's cough overcame her, and this time it must have been very severe for her whole face and throat reddened with it. Then she hastily added: "Cy will marry Essie at the first moment. The man who failed to keep faith with a girl under such circumstances would be shot if she had a male relative, if not, he would be run out of the county, as too low and vile to be endured in the settlement's midst," and once more Hulda turned to her kitchen, while Selina, amazed and depressed, wished with all her soul that she had the means to take her child and her mother and return to the East.

Hulda, supposing that her father would, of course, remain for supper down in the "bottom lands," where he had been helping at the barn-raising, was happily preparing a very light tea for herself, May and Selina, and the latter, feeling welcome and at home, took the liberty of drawing out the table and setting it. As she stepped lightly and briskly about the room, an

lad with rapture. 'Mother,' he would ask, 'will he ever find it?'

" 'Find what, dear?'

" 'What he is seeking for. He's in everything, under everything! He hunts in the ground and he puts his head up and smells in the air, Seek does! Grandpa said I was "a plumb cussed fool" for calling a dog Seek or Seeker either, and yet only on last Sunday, he said "Jason Gallaway was in danger of hell-fire for callin' his brother a fool for livin' down in the bottoms and gettin' the ague."'

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of strong will, when his grandfather had been unjust to him. His pretty manners seemed to irritate Father dreadfully: 'Golldurned, useless little cub, eatin' my vittals and bowin' and sirring, as if he mout be a gentleman!' he would growl. Nothing suited him. If Dred sat on the step and watched with bated breath the movements of a toad catching flies—Grandfather Toler raged at his uselessness. If I tied an apron about him and, standing him on a creepie, let him help wash and wipe the cups and saucers and spoons—he would jeer at the child, calling him 'Cissie!' and 'Great calf!'

"Eldred had never been in the country before and the poetry of nature thrilled him to the very heart. Had it not been for my father the child's life would have been ecstasy. He was never lonely. The trees, the plants, the birds, the animals were his companions. That old, nearly dead, butternut out there was from the first his 'raggedy-man,' and the trumpet-creeper, then only a young vine sporting three or four blossoms, was the raggedy-man's little girl. Great clouds, rolling up big with storm, he would greet with glowing eyes, and waving his arms, he would cry to them: 'Here, make the rain spill down here, please!' Then wild with delight, he would rush to me crying: 'They heard me, Mother!—see! see!' Then he would listen to the patter of the drops and knitting his brows would try to catch 'the tune,' he declared they played

on the low roof or the massed leaves. The thing that troubled him the most was the wind. What was it?—where did it live? Why couldn't he see it—when he could feel it? Sometimes, he said, it played with little bits of things, and some other times it shook the whole house, and 'please, Mother, what happened to make it get angry like that?'

"Let me show you just how observant those steady, blue-gray eyes of his were in his little boyhood days. I must tell you first, Father always asks a blessing at table, and shortly after we came here Eldred said to me: 'Mother, do you suppose God likes it when Grandpa asks angry blessings, that mean swears?'"

"Ah!" exclaimed Selina, "It's a wonder the boy has not learned to loathe religion!"

"Oh!" cried Hulda, "how I have striven to prevent that. As a little fellow he had never been whipped. He was very amenable to the wishes of his elders. True, his father had shaken him, had even boxed his ears once or twice, but nothing more. But one day, when Eldred, not knowing his grandfather was within hearing distance, was telling me the wonders he had seen that day, of the frog he had held in his very own hands, who had a for-true white vest on and green speckled trousers and coat and such a mouth! oh, my, such a mouth! and he had put him back in the mud. 'And—and, oh, Mother! do you know,' he cried,

excitedly, 'that every single green peach has on a dear little whity-gray petticoat!'

" 'Thar! that's enough lyin' for one day, you con-sarned little hound!' shouted Father. He sprang into the kitchen, and caught the frightened child by the arm. 'I'll lick the lyin' out of you, or I'll lick the life outen yer!'

" 'Father! Father!' I screamed. 'The boy is not lying. He means the down on the peach—it is like a little coat or petticoat. Dred has never told a real lie in his life!'

"He flung me back into the room, as he swung the child out of the door: 'Frogs wear vests, too, don't they!' he sneered, and in a moment more I heard the blows of the whip falling on that tender little body. Oh, I can't bear to recall it even now! As I held his quivering frame in my arms there was a look in his eyes that terrified me! My tears fell fast as I bathed the cruel weals that circled the small bare legs—but though great sobs shook him, his eyes were dry and the look in them was less of terror than of hate.

"After that for at least two or three years the boy's body was seldom free from the bruise or welt that illustrated Father's churlish tempers. Had Dred been the most depraved and vicious of boys he could not have been more severely dealt with—yet the blows did not hurt as much as the injustice of them.

"By his own forgetfulness, Father left the bars down

one day. Little Dred, finding them so, ran to seek his grandfather and tell him the cows were coming out. The old man punished him at once for not putting up the bars himself—only to find a half-hour later that their weight was far beyond his small strength to lift. And when a neighbor who had failed to return the borrowed laudanum bottle, sent it back by Dred, with the warning skull-and-cross-bones label nearly rubbed from it, he took the whip to the unfortunate boy, declaring he had removed the label, in the hope that his grandfather might some time swallow the contents, instead of simply putting it in the poultice for his boil. 'Consarn you!' he cried, at every blow. 'You'd like me ter swaller that stuff and sleep to death—wouldn't yer!'

"But shortly after that the beatings ceased—Eldred brought them to a sudden end. Some months earlier a distant neighbor had left a pretty white and yellow puppy here 'for the lonely little chap to play with,' as he said. Father was enraged, but he did not care to offend so powerful a man, who, by the way, was Mr. Stanway, the father of the girl whose beauty you so much admired the other day. And the very door of child-heaven opened for Eldred with the coming of his beloved 'Seeker,' as he called him. The beauty of the dog's brown eyes, the softness of his coat, his slobbery and multitudinous kisses filled the

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'Later he romped and raced and exerted himself in every way to make Seek happy. Now and then he caught him and kissed his eyes and head. He fairly gorged the dog at supper, 'Have you had enough—really and truly enough, for once?' he asked. He went to bed early. When I was preparing to go upstairs, I heard Dred's voice saying low, 'Poor Seek! here eat this! that's nicer, isn't it? Oh, Seek! Seek! what shall I do?'

'I loitered a while down stairs, fearing that if I went up then, the dog would give me a noisy wel-

come, and be thrown out of doors by Father in consequence. When I did at last creep into our room, Dred lay in bed, little Seek sleeping in his arms. I knelt to say my nightly prayer for my boy, and I wondered a little at the extreme quiet of the dog—who did not open his eyes, even when I passed my hand over his silky head—where Dred immediately pressed his cheek jealously. In the early dawn I rose—Dred still held Seek in his arms. My heart gave a startled plunge. He, apparently, had never moved. As I bent over them, Dred opened his eyes—his lips quivered piteously. ‘I did it,’ he said—he kissed the stiff little body tenderly—‘He can’t ever be hurt any more, Mother—and he was very happy here with us—he was. It was laudanum—and he slept and slept, and he never knew—but—but’ (he buried his head in the pillow), ‘but I knew!’

“I had taken breakfast from the table, when Father snarled, ‘Where’s that brat of yourn, Huldry? He’s got ter com’ ter his meals or go without. Eh? what?’

“Dred came in and laid the little dead dog before him. ‘I told you, you would never strike him again!’ he said, staring straight into Father’s face.

“‘W—what done it?’ he asked, confusedly.

“‘I did it,’ the child answered, and Mrs. Marsh, as I looked down into his steady eyes, I thought I saw an awful thing. He had killed his dog for love—but

and Seek whimpering and kissing his face and hands in a sort of terrified frenzy of love. 'Oh, thank you, Mother! thank you!' said Dred, and drying his eyes on his sleeve, boy fashion, he coaxed his pet to eat and drink. 'Mother,' he added, 'it was my turn to keep meat for him to-day, but will you do it, too? I—I—you see, well, I want him to be very happy just for the rest of to-day,' and he came close and whispered, 'Mother, oh, please! please let him sleep with me just this one single time in all the world? *He* won't know' (glancing toward the barn). 'Mother, please! Seek must be very, very happy to-night—he must, Mother—truly he must!'

'I thought I understood and I whispered back, 'We will try, dear!—but it must only be for this one night!' and was amazed to feel the storm of sobs that suddenly shook him from head to foot.

'Later he romped and raced and exerted himself in every way to make Seek happy. Now and then he caught him and kissed his eyes and head. He fairly gorged the dog at supper, 'Have you had enough—really and truly enough, for once?' he asked. He went to bed early. When I was preparing to go upstairs, I heard Dred's voice saying low, 'Poor Seek! here eat this! that's nicer, isn't it? Oh, Seek! Seek! what shall I do?'

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“‘I did it,’ the child answered, and Mrs. Marsh, as I looked down into his steady eyes, I thought I saw an awful thing. He had killed his dog for love—but

down in his very heart, he was killing his grandfather for hate!

"Oh, no! no!" exclaimed Selina. "Your dread of an inherited tendency has made you morbid, Mrs. Hollister! I'm sure you did your boy an injustice!"

"Do you think so?" questioned the poor woman, nervously clasping and unclasping her toil-worn hands, "I—I hope you are right—but, Mrs. Marsh, I saw murder in a man's eyes when he cried to Lavalley, 'I'll shoot you on sight—remember!' and" (with a shudder) "it's not a look that you forget. However, from that morning, Father never struck Eldred another blow, and for a time we rejoiced greatly—never dreaming that a day was coming when the lad would have been glad to endure daily thrashings, rather than the cruel and far-reaching punishment Father's malice had devised.

"From his very infancy, Dred had had a certain loving appreciation of books. He used to run about patting the cover of one and crying: 'The boy and the cat live in here!' Then stroking another, he would add: 'The pretty lady and the good robber-man, Robin-Hood, live in this one, don't they, Mama?'

"A little fellow was playing with him one day, and Dred asked: 'What 'yer goin' to do when you're a big man?' The question bringing the quick response: 'I'se goin' to have a big gun and kill big beasties! What you goin' to do?' And my boy answered: 'I'm

going to be bigger than Mama, and I’m going to have all the books in the world!’

“Oh, poor boy! All bright children are inquisitive—eager to find out, but little Dred wanted to know the ‘why’ and ‘wherefore’ of the thing after he had found it out. His imagination was over active. The night sky had an undying fascination for him. He would sit on the step and watch for the first faint twinkle in the blue. Then he would go out in the darkness and lie on his back in the grass and gaze upward at the sea of glory. Once he asked in an awed tone: ‘Mother, do you think the stars wash up against God’s big white throne?’ and I could only answer: ‘Perhaps, dear.’”

CHAPTER X

Old Man Toler Plans Mischief

Hulda, intent on supper, had gone to the kitchen to light a fire. Selina was shaking out and neatly folding the coarse undergarments the two women had been making, when a "hallo!" from the road attracted her attention. Calling Mrs. Hollister, she was about to resume her folding when her hostess begged her to go out to the gate and meet the couple waiting there. So presently, Mrs. Marsh was being introduced to young Cy Toler, grandnephew of Old Man Toler, and to his companion, Essie Brown, a pretty, foolish little thing, about seventeen, who held a baby in her arms.

After some general remarks about weather and the forwardness or backwardness of farm work, Cy, with broad grins of satisfaction, came to the business in hand. The minister that rode the circuit two years ago was coming down here in a few weeks' time, and he and Essie would be married then; and her folks would give a blow-out and a dance very likely—and as sort of relations, Mrs. Hollister and the Br—er'—Dred were wanted, and—(he hesitated and glanced at Essie, who poked him with her elbow and jerked her head toward Selina, whereupon he continued), and if

Mrs. Marsh would accept an invite, they all would be mighty pleased, and he reckoned the Gallaways would come, "though Kate and Mother Brown warn't any too thick."

Mrs. Marsh thanked them and said if her sister accepted, she would be glad to accompany her. Mrs. Hollister asked how Mrs. Brown was this spring, and Essie answered, "Pretty well, only kinder used up with the baby's teethin'."

"Oh," asked Mrs. Marsh, "is your baby sis——" but a cough from Hulda and a warning pressure of her foot gave her pause and she hurriedly excused herself to go and look after May.

In a few moments Hulda came in, and Selina asked, "What was it—what did I do?"

Hulda reddened, bit her lip and then answered: "You were making a mistake, that's all. That baby is not Essie's sister, but her own child."

Selina stared and exclaimed, surprisedly: "What? A widow at her age? why she can't be eighteen?"

"No," said Hulda, wearily, "she's not seventeen and she is no widow—pray God she may soon be a wife—now!"

Selina dropped into the nearest chair: "But—their—manner? I don't understand."

"No, I suppose not. This must be dreadfully shocking to a stranger, the more so, when I tell you that it is not an exceptional case. Yet this condition of affairs

is not the result of sheer vice, as you may hastily conclude, it is brought about by propinquity; the absolute freedom of young people from all restraining conventionalities, and by the difficulties that cluster about the marriage ceremony. Then, too, such laxity is greatly encouraged by the attitude of nearly the whole settlement. The girl in the case does not suffer in either standing or character, so long as the man remains loyal. People say they are going to be married as soon as they can, every one knows that the marriage ceremony is anticipated, that's all. Why, this girl, Essie Brown, is to-day more highly considered than I am, as a supposedly deserted wife."

"But what prevents their marriage at the 'proper time?'" demanded Selina, still bewildered.

"We have no church near; there is no minister at hand. We are supposed to be visited once or, on rare occasions, twice a year, by a traveling preacher, but it has happened that two years have passed without a visit. Then these people are very poor. They live on small clearings, or they work some one's place on shares. They have absolutely no money to travel with; they have no stock, no horses, or they might drive to the city, if they had a fee saved up, and be married there. So they calmly wait for Mahomet to come to the mountain. Why, one very popular woman living now down in 'the bottoms' had two little children

looking on delightedly at the festivities attending the marriage of their father and mother."

"Oh, it's dreadful!" cried Selina. "That poor girl to have fallen so low, almost in childhood! Her mother must have been wickedly careless!"

"My dear Mrs. Marsh," hastily broke in Hulda, "for mercy's sake! don't speak to any one else, in that tone, of Essie Brown. Remember her conduct is sanctioned here by custom and even your own sister, years ago——" Again Hulda's cough overcame her, and this time it must have been very severe for her whole face and throat reddened with it. Then she hastily added: "Cy will marry Essie at the first moment. The man who failed to keep faith with a girl under such circumstances would be shot if she had a male relative, if not, he would be run out of the county, as too low and vile to be endured in the settlement's midst," and once more Hulda turned to her kitchen, while Selina, amazed and depressed, wished with all her soul that she had the means to take her child and her mother and return to the East.

Hulda, supposing that her father would, of course, remain for supper down in the "bottom lands," where he had been helping at the barn-raising, was happily preparing a very light tea for herself, May and Selina, and the latter, feeling welcome and at home, took the liberty of drawing out the table and setting it. As she stepped lightly and briskly about the room, an

ugly old face was pressed against one of the windows. Zachary Toler had noted Hulda's trepidation in the early morning and had come home ahead of every one else "ter catch Huld'y at whatever she was up ter," and now he had, of course, no trouble in guessing who this stranger was: "H-m-m, comp'ny, behind my back!" he muttered. "Wal, that's doggon'd queer, for ther' ain't been no what yer might call reg'lar visitors ter Huld'y, sence I dunno when. I'll bet er cookie she's chuck'd more tea in ther pot than would do for a dozen men! I'll settle up with her for this."

Then, as he watched, his gaze intensified, a grim smile stretched his lips, for the same quickness and lightness of movement that had won for Selina the approbation of Wash Gallaway on that first Sunday, was now making a favorable impression upon Old Man Toler.

"Mighty s'pry on her feet. Moves like she knew she war erlive. Puts me in mind ther way Mirandy used ter git 'round ther house. She's got on Huld'y's apron too. Mebbe she's done som'ing for her grub arter all."

He went around to the kitchen where his sudden appearance so startled Hulda that the song stuck in her throat, while her hands lost their hold on the biscuit pan, which went rattling to the floor. This fright he looked upon as an evidence of his power and authority, and he was gratified accordingly, the more so when he found no meat had been cooked and the women were

preparing for a supper of biscuit, tea and some simple garden sauce. Whereupon Zachary turned upon Hulda and figuratively tore her tooth and nail for her lack of manners.

"No wonder she didn't hav' no vis'tors, if she couldn't treat 'em no better. She'd never seen her mother set down a vis'tor ter bread an' tea, if it war as strong as lye, an' she war ter hustle an' flax 'round now an' git some real vittles ready."

Mrs. Marsh begged that no change should be made on her account, because she must start very shortly for home, as she was not familiar with the way.

But Old Man Toler remarked, oracularly, that "She'd git hum all right enuff, an' Huldny war ter get some ham an' eggs ready, if thar warn't no fresh meat, an' cut er piece outen the new cheese."

Utterly taken aback, his daughter obeyed, even while doubting her senses; but it was a jesting word of Selina's that bred mischief in the cranky old man's mind.

Tea being ready, May had been called from the attic and Selina excused herself a moment to put the child's dress on, saying, as a mere joke, that she had taken it off to save the dress a day's wear. Never did the striking together of flint and steel send forth a spark more quickly than did the striking of these words upon the avarice of Old Man Toler. He felt the spark warming him into animation.

"Thar was a woman," he said to himself, "*as war* a

woman! Took ther dress offen her ter save a day's wear, eh? Wal, ther' was some sense in that." And as May, at a glance from her mother, carefully lifted the chairs to their places about the table, mentally he even accepted her as a "likely young-un, who had prob'ly been taught ter work."

When he had made a savage sort of snatch at a blessing on the evening meal and was handing around scant "helpin's," the spark struck by Selina's thrifty speech was already lighting a whole train of malicious thoughts and plans. "Yes," he was saying to himself, "she's er darn'd good-lookin' woman, white skinn'd an' plump like Mirandy war when she was young, an' let's see now, she's own sister ter Kate Gallaway, an' she orter hav' some money, if she ain't squander'd it all on tombstones—for the dear departed. Women be such fools that'a way. But took ther dress off ter save it a day's wear? N-n-no, I reckon she'd draw it mild on tombstones. Wish I could find out how she stands."

Whereupon, with laborious geniality he entered into conversation with Selina, asking her at last if she was going to buy a farm and settle down with them?

"Oh," answered she lightly, "I have no money."

Old Toler frowned: "W-why, what did yer do, lose it in business? Y-y-you shorely didn't squander't in dum foolishness?"

"No," laughed Selina, "I couldn't very well squander

what I didn't have. I never have had anything but my own earnings."

Old Zachary laid down his knife and fork and stared at her: "Bean't you full sister ter Kate Parsell that was, Gallaway that is?"

"Yes, I am her elder sister," answered she, somewhat surprised at his tone and manner, "and we're all poor together."

Old Toler snorted: "So yer call them poor, do yer?"

"Wouldn't any one call them poor?" sharply answered Selina. "Look how they live; compare that house with this; see how my sister works. Yesterday, while I cooked and did the house-work, Kate was out in the fields under the blazing sun, working with the men."

"Wal, an' what did she do it for?" jeered the old man.

"Not for her pleasure, certainly," retorted Selina, "but to help support her family and earn money for the payments that have to be made—*that's* what she did it for, I imagine."

"Payments? did yer say payments?" asked Old Toler, with an air of perplexity. "Payments on what, mout I ask?"

"Why, on their farm!" answered the now nettled visitor. "I suppose like other poor people they have to pay for this land by instalments."

A malicious grin spread over the ugly old face:

"Looks like ther Gallaways war kinder close-mouthed 'bout things ter hum, Mrs. Marsh. Say, Huldy, you ain't never heerd nothin' 'bout them payments, hev' yer?" A crackling laugh accompanied the word payment, and at the same time betrayed the fact that he was short of one large "tile-like" incisor and a couple of molars. But they had fallen by the wayside, for Zachary Toler was not the man, according to his own words, to pay no dentist "for pullin' out usable teeth an' throwin' 'em away—when, if he waited long enuff they'd drop out, an' he could throw 'em away hisself," and now yawning spaces proved that he had not waited in vain.

Hulda, red and uncomfortable, stammered that "she had not heard—she did not know, unless, perhaps, the Gallaways had a payment or two to make on their last—that was their third farm."

Selina set down her oup suddenly and, staring stupidly, asked: "What do you mean—who has a third farm?"

"Mighty pore people, them Gallaways," gibed the malicious Zachary. "So pore that, goll durn them, they hold more land than any one 'cept Bob Stanway in ther hull settlement."

"Then why do they live and work as they do—that's the question?"

Old Toler, like an ancient woodpecker, tapped the table with a hooked and hoary forefinger and snapped

out: "No, mum! yer plumb mistaken. The interestin' question is, *how did they com' by all that land?* Now, Jason Gallaway don't strike you as no plumb ge'nus of smartness an' wisdom, does he?"

"N—no," hesitated Selina. "I think he is a good, honest man of very ordinary ability."

Zachary grinned: "Yet he owns *three* farms—how d'yer 'spose now he's done it?"

"Worked hard for them, of course," sturdily answered Selina. "They toil early and late and deny themselves every comfort."

"Y-a-a-as," drawled Toler, "and I've denied *myse'f* every comfort, and my family war only three ter his six, an' I've been workin' early an' late jest thirty-five years longer than Jay Gallaway, an' I have *one* farm, an' about enuff over ter carry me thro' one bad set o' crops. But '" (he sighed ostentatiously) "my wife didn't bring me nothin' when we married."

"Neither did Kate bring Jason anything," asserted the loyal but ignorant Selina.

"H-m-m! didn't, eh? Wal, wal! jest dumgasted, everlastin' smartness, then, of Gallaway's own? Talk 'bout foresight, he must hev' had fore an' aft sight both. Eh? What? Got ter get-a-long hum? All right—yer com' ag'in, an' next time I'll show yer ther orchards, an' how I treat trees for the coddlin' worm," and he rose and left the room—and Hulda gasped for breath.

Selina was flushed, confused, shaken by what she had heard of her own people. She hatted and jacketed May and sent her out to the gate, and then turned to Hulda, and taking her hands, she asked: "How could you bear it—even for the boy's sake, how could you? You are the bravest woman I ever saw."

"You," said Hulda, with a tremulous laugh, "are surely the most patient to listen to such a story, but oh, the healing power of a woman's sympathy! I feel younger, brighter, more alive than I have been for years and years! And, Mrs. Marsh, what have you done to Father? Did you hear me gasp when he asked you to come again? But oh, I know him so well, he is planning mischief, not against you, I'm sure of that, but whether against me or Dred or the Gallaways, I can't guess."

"Mrs. Hollister," interrupted Selina, "is it really true about the three farms?" Hulda nodded her head. Selina went on: "Yet they live as no one else about here dreams of living—without even the decencies of life, and—and" (angry tears rising in her eyes) "my poor old mother is allowed to go without any relief for her suffering, without covering for her feet and this, you say, is not poverty?"

Mrs. Hollister, with eyes full of pain, answered sadly: "No, it is not poverty. The ruling passion in your home and mine is the same. My father and your

sister have been tarred with the same dreadful brush. It's not poverty, my dear, it's avarice!"

As Hulda's arm went around Selina's waist, she felt for the moment that she needed the support—then she said: "I must make haste and go or I may lose my way, it has grown so late. But before I leave you, I want to say something about your boy. Why should he wait till he is twenty-one before he learns to read, and then be made the laughing-stock of a lot of little country clods? Why cannot May and I assist him, unknown to any one but ourselves? His passionate desire, added to his natural cleverness, will make him an apt pupil, and in a few months' time, if I am compelled to remain here so long, he will no longer have cause to stand shame-faced before the girl he loves. Do you think Eldred would accept my assistance?" Then as Hulda suddenly averted her face, Selina hurriedly added: "You are vexed? I'm very sorry—believe me, I did not mean to wound either your pride or that of your son!"

"Pride?" cried Hulda, bitterly. "We have no pride! It has been scourged out of us! We are like whipped dogs—I grovel and shrink, while Dred crouches and growls. Oh, Mrs. Marsh, if you can do this thing, it will be like opening the gates of Paradise to my son, but it will be a service without reward, we are such a helpless pair!"

"Hush," said Selina, "I shall only be passing on the

gift a good woman freely gave to me—when I, half-orphaned and wholly deserted, served humbly in her home—so there can be no question of reward.”

Then the two women gravely embraced and went out to the front door. There, with a faint cry of: “Lord, be good to us! look at Father!” Hulda Hollister literally collapsed, sinking in a limp heap on the doorstep—for drawn up before the gate was the old farm wagon and horses; May perched delightedly on a chair behind the seat, and from the driver’s place, Old Man Toler grinned at Hulda, with such purely unqualified malice, that Selina, seeing it, shrank back as from a blow.

“Com’, Mrs. Marsh! hop right up!” he said. “It’s too late for a stranger ter be trapsin’ thro’ these here woods alone. No, the hosses have had supper—’sides it’s only a little way for them big critters ter go. That’s right—wal, wal! yer be spry, by gum!” He added mentally: “She makes ther purtiest rod ter hold over the backs of Huldny and that brat of hern!”

Suddenly, as they drove away, he asked: “Whar’ mout yer have been when Old Man Parsell died?”

“In Canada probably,” answered Selina, “though I can’t be sure, as I don’t know just when grandfather passed away.”

Again that hateful crackling chuckle: “Wal, wal! they do keep kinder close ’bout things happenin’, don’t they! If I war you I’d sort’er inquire ’bout people

and things—things in partic'lar. Wal, here we be—
an' I'll bet a cookie that Jay Gallaway won't sleep
so well's usual ter-night."

As they drove up to the fence, 'Lonzo, recognizing Old Man Toler in Selina's escort, let out a yell of laughter that would have startled a deaf adder, and back at the Toler house Hulda rolled her head upon her hands, her face wet with streaming tears, while shriek after shriek of hysterical laughter tore at her throat, and every now and again, she gasped: "Lord, be good to us! Lord, be good to us! Father wants to marry her!" Again the shriek of strangling laughter: "She won't have him, I know that, but—but he wants to marry her! Oh, I knew well he was planning mischief!"

CHAPTER XI

Honey-Dew

Grandmother Parsell had been suffering even more than usual for some time, and in answer to faintly murmured questions (for Kate Gallaway showed open disapproval of any intimate conversation between mother and daughter), Selina learned that a country doctor had recommended a pellet of opium now and then, to control the agonizing pain cancer caused the aged woman—learned that Jason would provide the drug willingly, but such dreadful outbursts from Kate's temper marked each small purchase, that the poor soul, though suffering torture, did without even temporary relief, rather than face a storm of angry abuse. Poor Selina felt her heart contract with pain as she thought of that almost empty pocket-book of hers, but resolved that those last small bits of silver should go for a little of the common gum-opium people were content to use at that time. She had about decided to ask 'Lonzo to try to get it for her, when May, who had been down to Grandam Gallaway's on an errand, returned and sidling up to her mother, told her she had seen Mr. Dred bringing Grannie Gallaway home and he had to hurry back to Mr. Stanway's—but had

given her a message first for Grandma Parsell, telling her to deliver it privately.

"Privately?" Selina groaned. "What privacy could be found in this crowded little houseful of watching eyes and listening ears?" But by and by, she slipped outside, and stooping beneath the window where her mother sat, she said low and clear: "Mother, go to the currant bushes—May has a message for you from Dred Hollister," then she returned to the house, carefully examining a table-cloth she had had out bleaching on the grass.

Presently Grandma Parsell asked Kate if she should pick a few currants for her, and having received a scowl and a tin basin, unaccompanied by word of any kind, she limped painfully away toward the bushes; and little May, chasing a butterfly, came close to the suffering woman and whispered: "Grandma, Mr. Dred got something for you the other day, something he thinks you want very much, and he says, can some one meet him at dusk at the cross-roads corner on his way home, after to-night, and bring it to you? He says he will carry it every day till some one comes to get it—only I don't know what it is—not one bit, I don't." But Grandmother knew what it was and tears of gratitude wet her white old cheeks, for once before the kind-hearted lad, when working for Jay Gallaway at harvesting time, had for very pity obtained a bit of opium for her and a simple cooling ointment as well

—but the storm that followed had made him cautious. This time, moved by a desire to serve Selina, who had brought a ray of pleasure into his mother's life, he had secured a little of the drug, but dared not for the afflicted woman's sake bring it in person—hence the message intrusted to May.

All that day Selina sought vainly an excuse for going out in the evening—but she had made certain odd preparations. She remembered that she had spread a Cleveland newspaper on the bottom of her trunk and in the afternoon she dragged the box from beneath the old-fashioned post-bedstead, and began to empty it right down to the bottom. As she worked, John Parsell, on his way to the mill, stopped and came in a few moments to see Selina, and his mother in particular; fearing the hot weather was increasing her pain and weakness; and kneeling by the trunk and talking over her shoulder, Selina became careless and dropped on the floor, first a small bottle of smelling-salts—which had no sooner been returned to her than down fell, from a rolled-up night-dress a revolver.

John sprang forward, concealing it from Grandmother Parsell, and as he passed it back to its owner, he said in a low voice: "For God's sake, Selina!—what are you doing with a thing like that? W-was it—was it your husband's? Do you keep it for his sake?"

"Yes," said the woman—a slow smile creeping about

her lips. "I keep it for my husband." And John, supposing her widowed, took no heed of the vast difference between keeping a revolver for a husband or for the sake of one. Then, as she laid it beneath a pile of clothing, she added: "I have had to travel long and far, John, without protection and evil men are always starting up in the path of a lonely woman. I need this to frighten people with."

"Poor Sister!" John said with such genuine pity in his kindly voice and Parsell eyes of china-blue, that swift tears came to Selina's, and she said: "I'm going to tell you all about myself, Brother, when I go to your house and can see you alone."

"Thank you," he answered, simply and gratefully, and rose to go.

Selina removed the paper and returning the clothing to the trunk, pushed it back beneath the bed. Then she carefully cut away the large letters that spelled Cleveland and the paper's name, and Kate being in the garden, she took advantage of her absence to make a little flour paste in the kitchen and then, with May's eager help, pasted the thirteen large letters—duplicates being rejected, upon a sheet of fool's-cap paper, forming a rude sort of primer.

The little girl who had long been her troubled mother's confidante and adviser, having first been bound to strictest secrecy, now, delighted, heard her mother's plan to teach Dred Hollister to read. But

when she spoke of the mortification and pain he suffered because of his ignorance, the child's face began to flush and with brimming eyes she suddenly exclaimed: "Oh, Mama! I know now what I did to him, poor Mr. Dred!"

"What you did to him? What do you mean? Tell me this instant!"

The upright line that appeared between the brows, and the swift condemnatory pressure of the lips before a word of the childish confession had been spoken, frightened the small suspect, so that she stammered out her first words, with eyes wide and scared.

"Why—now—why, Mother—you see, for days I went to the woods and watched and watched up in the forked trees to find the gold-and-black bird's nest—and—and it was so hot and my neck so tired and the boys would come and laugh at me and not tell me why. And then one other day Mr. Dred came by, going with lots of Mr. Stanway's letters to the village, and he wanted to know why I was there alone in the hot. And I did tell him, and he said the boys were cruel little devils—'cause they knew better. He told me the bird's name was Oriole, and he never made any nest in tree forks, but always, always lived near orchards and hung his nest from drooping boughs, and preferred elms. And he got down and tied the horse and took me by the hand and led me away back to the orchard, and he asked me was there any elms near it. And I

telled him” (“You what?” sternly interjected Selina), “I—I—oh, excuse me, Mama, I did tell him—no, I told him, I mean, I only knew hickory and oak and paw-paw trees yet, and he laughed and pretty soon he lifted me up in his arms and said, ‘Look,’ and Mother, there was a sort of little gray bag or purse, hanging down from three twigs, it was just like coarse knitting, and that was the oriole’s nest. And Mr. Dred has one at home that has purple and green threads in it, ’cause he put them out on the bushes for the birds to take. And, don’t you think, they wouldn’t touch the red threads—not at all. And they live by the orchards, to pick little lice and bug’s eggs and other teeny things off the tree’s bark, and after they have cleaned up the orchard, he said, they pay themselves by taking some ripe fruit for their families. And I said, ‘Mercy! Mr. Dred, what a lot of books you must have read about those birds,’ and then he pulled his hand away and went all red and scowled me a dreadful scowl and walked away so fast. And I runned—I mean I ran after him, and asked, ‘Please, Mr. Dred, are you cross to me—did I say something wrong?’ And he smoothed my hair and said very kindly—‘No, dear, I got a little sting, that’s all, and because it came unexpectedly, it made me flinch. But I was a coward and a brute to show you my hurt,’ and he smiled and promised me some little quail eggs, some day. Then he went away—and oh, Mother! now I know he was not stinged—

it was just what I said about the books, that he couldn't read at all, that hurt him," and May's head went down on her mother's shoulder and for once the tender-hearted little one escaped punishment of any kind for a small *faux pas*.

At supper that evening, Selina found the excuse she had sought all day. 'Lonzo remarked that "Hulda's Brat had said that honey-dew had fallen already," and Jason boomed out "that it war three weeks too early for it to appear."

Selina asked what it was, saying she could not recall ever hearing of such a thing in Canada days. Then the children, who loved the sticky sweetness of the mysteriously varnished leaves, cried out for permission to go to the woods and see if honey-dew would fall that night—and when Jason objected, Selina saw her excuse looming up before her and quickly said: "Wait till to-morrow evening, children, and I will go to the woods and look for this curious thing and if I find it, I will bring you all the leaves I can carry."

Next night, therefore, leading May by the hand, she walked away in the sweet warm dusk, ostensibly in search of honey-dew, while in reality she strained every nerve to reach the cross-roads in time to intercept young Hollister, on his way home. The stillness, the dimness, the strangeness of this waiting, gave her a dream-like feeling. The land lay unfenced, with the thick wood creeping down close to the glimmer-

ing white road. Up above, the uncounted starry host had not yet begun the mighty march across the heavens. Only here and there a single star trembling through the wide purple spaces—while a slender honey-yellow moon lifted her young beauty just beyond the reach of the upward straining giants of the wood.

Then, at last, one shadow detached itself from the greater masses and coming nearer began to take definite shape—a man on a horse, whose iron-shod feet were almost soundless, falling upon the deep fine dust of the road.

“Who’s there?” demanded Selina, from out the deep shadow.

“The Brat, as you know damn’d well!” sullenly replied the rider; and catching a glimpse of the two dim figures, he cried confusedly: “Oh, good Lord! I didn’t know it was *you*!” Then at Selina’s quick laugh he stumbled on: “I mean, I didn’t know it was you, Mrs. Marsh! Please excuse my roughness. I thought perhaps ’Lonzo had come here, for your mother, and was playing off some joke or trick on me. And I grow very tired of being a butt for all our rustic wits. Will you take this to Mrs. Parsell, please?” and he passed a small paper-wrapped parcel to Selina.

Then she swiftly explained her second purpose in coming, and the excuse she had seized upon to get there, and out of the increasing darkness a moved young voice said: “Mrs. Marsh, you won’t get discour-

aged and give me up, will you, if I happen to be slow? I'll try to learn quickly, but people say grown-ups are slower than children. Mrs. Marsh, I'd go mad if you began to teach me and then gave me up—'twould be like showing a bone to a starving dog and then snatching it away from him."

And Selina answered: "I shall not tire or give up—don't fear it. I have brought some letters with me, and would give you a lesson now, but we have no light."

"Yes, we have," joyfully contradicted Dred, taking from the saddle pommel, where it hung, an old perforated tin lantern, and lighting a candle inside.

"Come into the wood, just a little way, Mrs. Marsh, lest some one should come along the road—though that is not at all likely to happen," and lifting May to Jerry's back, he led the horse with one hand and Selina with the other, into the dark and silent wood. And presently the woman sat on a log, the open lantern at her side sending out a stream of light upon the improvised primer on her knee and upon the handsome intent young face of Hulda's Brat—as with knitted brows and almost fierce eyes he measured and compared the few letters before him.

The identity of C and D confused him greatly—until the profoundly interested May, holding Jerry in the background, called out: "Mr. Dred, if you'd just

notice that C is open on one side and D is shutted up all around, they won't look so alike any more."

And the pupil thanked her gravely and really profited by the childish advice. When he asked if there were not more letters in the alphabet, Selina explained her difficulty, but added that a way would be found out of it by the time he had learned these thirteen perfectly.

She rose to go, but he pleaded: "Once more—just once more name them over!" and then, as she declared school dismissed, he carefully folded the paper, wrapped his cotton handkerchief about it and placed it in his pocket.

Bringing them back to the road, he left them holding Jerry there, while the swift, light padding of his feet in the deep dust told he was running from them toward the great sea of shadow that next moment engulfed him.

Not a leaf moved, the stillness was extraordinary, about her all seemed chaotic, vague, uncertain. She gazed upward into that all heaven-wide encampment, now crowded to the uttermost confines with the glittering cohorts of the sky, the massed millions, all moving with a stupendous precision that alone must convince the reeling human mind of the existence of the creating God. May pressed closely to her, and in a rather frightened voice said: "Did you see that, Mama? It was strange, wasn't it?"

"What was strange?" asked Selina.

"Why, the trees lightning'd, Mama—they did, indeed. Little flashes, not long zigzags, you know. There—there! now see, the bushes are doing it!"

"Oh, May!" laughed her mother, "no wonder the children make fun of you—little city dunder-head! That's not lightning. Don't you remember the song about the 'Fire-fly's flash'? Keep very still and perhaps one will come on your dress and you can see the pretty light quite plainly."

Again the silence and then the padding on the dusty road, and Dred was placing in her hands great branches of leaves that were sticky to the touch and cloyingly sweet to the taste.

"Jason said it was too early for this honey-dew to fall," remarked Selina. "He will have to admit his mistake."

"Yes, it is early," answered Dred, "but" (thoughtfully) "I don't believe it is a dew. If it were, all leaves would receive it. I heard Amabel—Miss Stanway say that a school-teacher once told her he thought some kind of insect spread this sticky film on the leaves, but I can never find any sign of them. And sometimes I wonder if the leaves themselves don't squeeze up or give off, or—" "Exude," suggested Selina. "Yes, I guess that's the word; exude the drops. You know lots of things besides maple have sweet sap."

"No," she replied, "I did not know it," and she could not help thinking that reading would be like mental seven-leagued boots to this observant and thoughtful boy—carrying him to heaven only knew what goal! Aloud, she suddenly asked if he knew any house or farm in the country-side, where she would stand a chance to earn a money wage?

The surprise and pain in the young man's startled exclamations were real enough to touch Selina deeply. But she repeated her question and he answered, despondently, that he knew of but two families who ever paid actual money for service of any kind—Mr. Robert Stanway's and Mr. Thaddeus Brooks's. Mr. Brooks was not so very well off, but his wife, Aunt Marcia, as they called her, was apt to have long sicknesses and she had no one at home to nurse her. The country women were so rough-handed they hurt her in lifting her about, and he paid cash down to a nurse from the city—when one was needed. The Brookses lived away beyond Stanway's, but he'd ask the stage-driver some day how things were out in that direction—as he knew everything going on.

"But Mrs. Marsh, surely Kate Gallaway will never permit such a thing. People are talking now about the amount of work you do in her house. Impertinent? Oh, I don't know! you a visitor? When she held back the burial of poor old Azariah Gallaway so long, perhaps for revenge, he took her popularity to

the grave with him—at all events she has none now, and dull dislike changes into active hatred with astonishing swiftness in these parts.” He paused, listening intently. “We had better part here. I think that was Gallaway’s dog that barked. Perhaps some one is coming to look for you. When may I hope for another lesson, Mrs. Marsh?”

“I’ll come or send May to you to-morrow evening, if possible. Good night!” and the little party separated. Selina with bowed head walked slowly, trying to piece together the odds and ends of various remarks about her sister. She was not friends with this one—she had not spoken for months to that one. Her own brother had not crossed her threshold for years and now this remark of Eldred’s about delaying the burial of Old Man Gallaway, recalled the wild words of Grannie Gallaway, who had cursed her daughter-in-law. Not one single word of neighborly kindness, of praise, of approval of any kind had Catharine Gallaway’s name drawn forth. Why? She recalled the harsh treatment meted out to her old mother, the unfailing watch kept upon her own movements. “She acts as if I were a spy from her enemy’s camp, and sometimes I see actual fear looking at me from Jason’s eyes. And yet in this whole world there is no creature so powerless for harm as am I. It’s a dreadful life; just one thing makes it bearable, the blessed conviction that I have escaped Charles Paul Lavalle.

Even in the city, where I see I shall have to go eventually to earn money to clothe us, May will be free to go about openly like other children, without fear of being seized by that suave and smiling devil, whose path through life is plainly marked by the shamed tears of women. Yes, Kate Gallaway is better than Charles Paul Lavallo," she rather grimly concluded, as she walked along the dusty road, through the unnatural quietude of the young summer night.

Dred Hollister had come but a few paces out of his way with Selina, and now retracing his steps he felt an eager longing to look once more at the precious letters that perhaps he might not see until the next night; and as he glanced about him for a place to rest the lantern, a puzzled look came into his eyes that grew slowly into pleased recognition. This was the very spot where Amabel had sat and read the "Wonder-Man's" thoughts to him. Yes (lifting the lantern high and peering about), there was the sea of fern, whose waves were nearly waist high now, and here the very log, mossed in patches and long streaks, and there the very circle of gray-green lichen, where, growing weary for a moment, she had rested the white wonder of her hand.

How strange that chance should lead him here, to learn his first letters. Then came a thought, childish even to silliness, yet sweet as nectar, pure as dew, to the blushing giant. The thought that he would surely

succeed in this undertaking, because forsooth he knew the first letter of that all-powerful alphabet was also the first letter of Amabel's name.

"Oh, my beloved!" he cried, holding the primer to the light. "Shall I ever recognize these letters swiftly at a glance, as you do? Will they ever be my friends—generous, willing friends; ready to band themselves together in my service, opening doors close-barred against me now, that lead to the garnered wisdom of the mighty dead! Will they ever make clear to me the lovely thoughts of that God-gifted—my Wonder-Man?" (the blood went rushing to his face). "Oh, if ever it comes to that!" he cried, peering about him in the unnatural stillness and marking the place well, "I'll bring her, Earth's most beautiful, to this very spot, and at her feet, I'll read the Wonder-Man's 'St. Agnes' Eve,' and feel myself a man among men, and be shamed before her no more forever!"

And then poor Dred, from the pinnacle of imaginary triumph, came down with a rush and a bump to sordid reality, when with a smothered oath he discovered that of the whole thirteen letters boldly challenging his identification, he could recognize but three, and two even of these he owed to May's illuminating remarks on the structural differences between C and D. So C, D and A were all that he had gained by his first lesson, and a sudden furious rage against his grandfather shook him to the heart, an absolute hatred for

the man whose petty tyranny had brought this shame upon his own young manhood; forcing him to accept secretly from a stranger the instruction that should have been his at the age of five years. And now he dared not ask the slightest help from his mother, for Old Man Toler's eye was never off them. He would know what was going on, and with devilish ingenuity he would find means to make his poor mother suffer. So he must just stumble on, praying God that Mrs. Marsh's patience might endure, and—and that some day he might not forget how old a man his grandfather had become.

As he mounted and rode homeward, Selina and May were approaching the dwelling that the former mentally termed "Catharine's Cattle Car," so herded together were men, women and children; and in such dearth of the decencies of life. Revolting as these conditions had seemed at first they were doubly so now that she understood that it was by her sister's own will that the family led this brutally unseemly life.

Selina stood a moment looking through the small open window and saw that the trundle-bed was already drawn out from beneath the big one, pushed tightly in the corner, and noted that the two covered a trifle less than one-half of the entire floor space of the living-room. She smiled as she recalled the day when she had attempted to draw these beds out from the stagnant air of the corner walls and sweep away

the accumulated dust from beneath them, and Catharine's angry declaration that the dust didn't do any harm as long as it was *under* the bed, and as for stagnant air, whatever that was, perhaps they had such finicky truck in cities, but there wasn't none on farms. And thereafter, with a sickening soul, this enlightened housekeeper had seen the trundle bed, ten minutes after its occupants had left it, all unaired, being shoved away beneath the over-bed—wondering meantime why they were not all sick or dead.

She was about to enter when she bethought herself of her mother's suffering, and bidding May hold the leaves and branches and wait there quietly for her, she slipped around to the back of the house and crept to the window of the tiny room, in which the aged woman lay. A low, tremulous moan came to her ears and then the faintly breathed words: "Dear Lord, dear Lord! Just for a little sleep—a little rest from this gnawing pain!"

There was a lump in Selina's throat as she heard, and very softly she called: "Mother! Mother! put your hand out to me, dear—"

But before she got further, the wan old face appeared all drawn with pain, and with trembling eagerness she begged: "Selina! oh, Selina! can you bring me a cup of water and pass it in at the window—my thirst seems to dry up my very blood, and Kate won't let me bring water to the room—she says it's a pre-

tense, that she doesn't drink in the night, and I don't need to!"

With a groan Selina turned away and obtained a dipper of water from the well-bucket that happened to be standing filled, and returning with it, saw—saw it drained to the last drop.

"God bless you, Daughter!" gratefully whispered the sick woman, and then as she felt the small package pressed into her hand, she exclaimed: "God has heard my prayer! Insignificant—useless as I am, I prayed for a little rest from pain, and it is here!"

"Hush!" breathed Selina. "I must go, Mother. May is waiting for me. I'll come in before I go to bed and I will bring a cup of water to you, temper or no temper," and she slipped quietly around to the front again.

May had intended to stand on the bit of porch during her waiting, but the boys and 'Lonzo had turned it into a sort of sartorial parlor, and by the dim light falling through the window they tested and examined their few garments, noting any dangerous lack of buttons or a too yawning rent; then rolling up the damaged article they pitched it inside the window to receive first aid from the boggling fingers of Catharine Gallaway—while they sat in hickory shirts, cheerfully discussing social matters in the village or the political outlook for the fall, and waited for their breeches to be hurled back to them. It was all very simple and

quite satisfactory to them, but distinctly embarrassing to May—who had not yet become accustomed to the local male costume of blue shirt and the remnants of a pair of trousers.

So she had turned toward the front door and, holding the branches of honey-dewed leaves in her tired little hands, she waited. Suddenly Watch discovered her, and with a whine of joy he greeted his small friend, leaping clumsily about her. Kate Gallaway was at the door on the instant, peering out: "Who's there?" she demanded—then seeing May, she cried: "Well, I'm doggon'd!" and in a voice of absolute malice, added: "Yer spyin' little brat!"

Jason, who had been hunched up by the ill-odored lamp, laboriously reading something aloud, stopped and came to the door, saying warningly: "Kate! Kate!"

But she repeated: "The spyin' little brat! hidin' herself behind them leaves! Throw 'em down! throw 'em down, I tell yer or I'll—" She sprang toward the child and caught her by the arm, when a voice, quivering with passion, came through the darkness: "Take your hand off my child, Kate Gallaway, or it will be the worse for you! She is standing there because I ordered her to wait there for me!" Selina tore the branches from May's hands and flung the green mass upon the porch to the boys, crying: "There's the

honey-dew for your children—my child has received her reward for bringing it!”

“Why—why,” stammered Kate, “I just thought she was’er watchin’ us for fun,” while Jason boomed some confused words about “not gettin’ mad,” “wasn’t nuthin’ meant by nobody,” and as Selina led the child to the far corner to prepare her for bed, she observed: “The secrets of this house must be pretty dangerous when a child of eight years is feared as a spy!”

If a bomb had exploded in the room the effect upon the Gallaways could not have been more stupefying than was this resentful but unpremeditated expression of angry motherhood. Jason tumbled heavily into the chair that mercifully stood in the line of his collapse; Kate caught at the bedpost and swayed dizzily, while her mean small face whitened visibly through the smoky yellow light and Melissa, already in the trundle-bed, rose on her elbow while her bright, gypsyish eyes raced from face to face in eager curiosity.

Then into the ghastly silence, ’Lonzo, maliciously triumphant, fired the single word “Bull’s-eye!” and broke into the chuckling, chortling, choking laughter that is the rustic’s expression of rapturous enjoyment.

Kate reached her hand for a bunch of leaves and passing them to little Melissa, said in a subdued voice, whose tremor she could not yet control: “Here’s some honey-dew your aunt brought you; see that you thank her for it.” And thanks being a foreign rite, un-

known and unpractised by the young Gallaways, Selina bent low over a refractory knot to hide a smile of amusement.

But again from the darkness outside came the mirth-strangled voice of 'Lonzo: "And the third time—when they were *all frightened*, you know, boys, it returned to the ark carrying a green leaf. Oh, Lord! oh, Lord!" as the voice smothered into laughter.

Jason boomed angrily: "'Lonzo! you 'Lonzo! w-what do yer mean——"

"'Ter do in the mornin'?" swiftly interrupted the hired man. "Tackle the south field of wheat, as it's the heaviest. But, Gallaway, yer didn't plumb finish readin' that ere half-print, half-writ circular, did yer?"

Jason pulled at one earring—his wrath was quickly assuaged, but he glanced uneasily at his women folk.

Selina, lightly covering May and Melissa with the coarse sheet, said: "If you were reading, Jay, go on, don't stop on my account."

Kate looked relieved and Jason, with a grunt of satisfaction, resumed his place and, sweeping aside a circle of scorched millers, bugs and heaven knows what other small creatures of the night lured to that fiery death, he read slowly on, stopping now and then to discuss the matter in question—then heavily reading out a few more words with loud breathing and much winding and unwinding of great legs beneath the table. Thus Selina half unconsciously learned as she

moved about, taking water to her mother and finally slipping into the trundle-bed—using Catharine as a screen between herself and the window—that one C. Masker (horrid name, she thought), agent for Follinsbee and Smith's Agricultural Machine Co., would be down to Adams County again in a week or ten days, and would look in on them.

"Yes," laughed 'Lonzo, "he'll look in on yer, Jason, for about twelve dollars' worth of smiles and bows and prettyments, that would blush up a girl. Twelve's what's due on the thrasher, ain't it?"

"Oh!" grinned Jason, "he's all right—if thar ain't any young gals 'round. But why don't some'un take the gals and lock 'em up an' set a bull-dog ter watch 'em while he's 'round?"

"Dog?" cried 'Lonzo. "He ain't feared of no dog—why, he'd choke it with his bare hands!" (Selina's eyes flew open suddenly.) "He's no coward! that's the only decent thing 'bout Masker, and can't he jes' bow to the queen's taste, with his Frenchified manners? He has a nerve of brass, and he——"

"Wal, the big feller's good fer business with us farmers," interrupted Jason, "but in spite of good looks he must be an ornary sort of cuss, for they say that girl down the river killed herself, ruther'n com' back ter the farm after Masker lit out. Whew! my!"

A blaze of lightning—a long earth-shaking rumble of thunder and a sudden sweep of damp air as if the

small hot house had caught its breath convulsively. Selina thought of the unnatural stillness of the wood and said to herself: "This is what it was waiting and listening for. Oh, what will become of us if Kate closes up the house tight against the storm!" She was not listening to the men. What was a C. Masker or any other man to her, so long as she kept free of Charles Paul Lavalley? She had not seen him for two years—yes, near two and a half now, and out here she was surely safe. She drew the hand of May to her lips and softly mumbled at it, and so dropped into sudden slumber and dreamt that a man—a big man, was standing in the farmhouse door and Kate, pointing to him said: "It's C. Masker," while to the very bottom of her shuddering soul she knew it was Charles Paul Lavalley. She struggled to leave the room, but before she could escape he turned. She gave a wild scream and started up in bed, to find every one peering out of the porch window.

"Don't be skeered, Selina," said Jason, kindly. "It was only the big hickory that went down plumb acrost the rail fence. Listen!—if the horses are quiet, 'Lonzo—Yes?—good! Jehosephat! hear the rain!"

Selina was quietly slipping again into sleep—when something seemed to say to her, quite distinctly and plainly: "Selina! Selina Parsell! who does this describe, 'Big man with Frenchified manners, a bow to the queen's taste, his only good trait not being a

coward, a man with nerves of brass, a man who deceives and abandons?" Is that C. Masker or is it Charles Paul Lavallo?" She never closed her eyes again that night.

CHAPTER XII

A Harvesting

Harvest was over. The long blazing days, crowded with extra work and excitement, the good days of jest and prank and laughter were gone. Granaries were filled and golden straw was piled high here and yonder. Jason's threshing-machine had proved so great a success that he declared his intention of talking to Masker when he came around about one of them "harvestin'—er, reaping-machines, that he was crackin' up so to ther farmers."

Yes, it had been a fine harvest, but for Selina the delight of it had been ruined by her sister's temper. Standing out by the low rail fence, trying to catch a breath of the evening coolness, Selina slowly turned and polished an apple known as the Harvest-Queen. Now and again she raised it to her face and smilingly inhaled its almost spicy fragrance. It recalled her little girl days and her gentle-mannered old grandmother, who had always received with such smiling pleasure the first ripe Harvest-Queen. In all the orchard there had been but that one tree of the Queens and all the grandchildren knew and respected it, as grandmother's very own.

Wearied out, she leaned against the fence, her arm stretched at full length along the upper rail, and saw in memory the perfectly kept, highly cultivated Canadian farm. The broad fields, the big barns, the fair orchards, the handsome horses Tom and Ned, and the imported bull every one stood in awe of, because of the incredible price paid for him; and suddenly, for the first time in her life the thought came to her: "Why, Grandfather must have been very well off."

Slowly she recalled the interior of the house she had loved to visit; the tall clock, the chest of drawers with brass handles and claw feet holding spheres of glass. What had become of these things when the Mormon craze had seized upon the mind of their owner—and the property? Dreamily she wondered what had become of that, too? Perhaps Kate might tell her. "Oh!" and with a jump and a laugh Selina was back in Illinois; the wet broad muzzle of a six months' pet heifer punching at her wrist and hand, the pretty, dark, woman-like eyes pleading for the apple.

"Go away, Star!" laughed Selina, "you probably have a peck of wind-falls in your stomach now." But Star folded expectant ears back dejectedly, gave a piteous little sobbing, calfy "moo—oo," and poked again at the hand that held the tempting morsel, and Selina said: "You young hypocrite, you'll shed tears in another minute! So there, take my Harvest-

Queen, but" (hurriedly) "for heaven's sake, don't let Kate see you eating it, or——"

Suddenly she stopped and with a curling lip thought: "So, I too am coming to fear the rod—am I? In olden time people would have said such a woman was possessed of a devil. Alas, this small sister of mine harbors in her breast the several devils, avarice, jealousy, cupidity, with malice and hatred unspeakable!"

The world over, harvest-time is recognized as a period of top-notch effort for every one concerned. Women, even more than men and horses, strain at the collar, and at need leave the cooking-stove and dishpan temporarily to wield a rake, to gather and bind the golden grain into the sheaf of correct size and shape, proudly keeping up with the men in the doing of it.

Such labor would be almost unendurable unless lightened by the merry challenge, the occasional jest, the laughter and sweetened by the surreptitious love making that has been a concomitant part of every harvest-field from the time that the keen-eyed and kindly Boaz was safely taken by the clever old fisher of men, Naomi, and her innocent young lure, Ruth.

Selina's neatness of attire, her fertility of resource, her extreme activity and good humor made her popular at once with the strapping farmer lads, who with horses and wagons, scythes, cradles and rakes were gathered together to help Gallaway with his wheat;

and this popularity filled Catharine Gallaway with a bitter jealousy that found expression in such fleers and jeers as would have been unbearable but for a discovery Selina had made. Glancing through the window she had seen Kate come from the kitchen carrying a kettle. Suddenly she dropped it, raised her hand high and resting it against the porch post, dropped her head upon her arm and closed her eyes, while her usually pale face flushed red then paled again. Something in the attitude, something in this sudden suffering of the woman aroused a tender suspicion in her sister's mind. Selina glanced at her mother questioningly and the older woman slowly bowed her head in answer, and so it came about that this visitor worked harder than ever, trying to lighten her sister Kate's labor, accepted in silence stinging sarcasms or harsh rebuff, because of that discovery, that was so familiar yet so mysterious, that was a promise and yet a threat.

In the midst of the everlasting "fryin' of vittles" for the hands on the last day, Jason came in with a troubled face. He had heard "low-down, rumbling thunder," he said, "an' them dazzlin' white clouds was a pilin' up like the mountains in the gogriphy books, and he was afeared thar was rain nigh."

"Why," said Selina, "the sun is blazing, Jay."

"I know it is, *now*—but yer don' know what that low, close to the ground thunder means. I tell yer we'll be lucky if we don' get it plumb hard 'fore

night. It'll play the devil an' all with a lot of my wheat." He almost groaned as he looked at the set table. "A hull hour taken off for eatin', too!"

"Send over for Cy Toler to come and help," suggested Kate.

"Have," growled Jason, "but Huldys Brat got him up to Stanway's yesterday as an extra hand an' he ain't back yet. I've got my brother Nash a-comin' over, but he's only got one good arm ter work with."

He sighed heavily. "I wish it war so Mother could com'—she's worth three men in a hay or wheat field, but"—the look his wife gave him prevented further speech on that subject.

"I'll go out as soon as you have had dinner," volunteered Selina. "I'm afraid I won't exactly win a prize for rapidity, but I'm sure I've not forgotten how to gather and bind a sheaf properly."

"Why, Seliny, it isn't fair ter put you inter the field ter do a man's work," boomed Jason, in polite protest; but his face brightened visibly for every hand would count against a possible storm.

"Huh!" snorted Kate, "man's work? much man's work she'd do—more like child's work. How long do yer 'spose her head an' back'll last? But *I'll* be thar, an' I'm as good as any man in a grain field!"

"Oh, Kate!" remonstrated Selina, "don't please!" and even Grandmother Parsell faintly ventured an entreaty "not to overwork so, in such dreadful heat,

too," and was promptly made to regret her temerity.

So it came about that Dred Hollister caught a distant glimpse of Mrs. Marsh working with the harvest hands, and though he read the cause in the over-clouding sky, his gorge rose at the sight and he came to a quick resolve. Pushing red Jerry to his best speed he was soon in the Stanway farm-yard.

When Dred had first taken his place as a sort of working overseer, he had been made to feel the presence of an unruly element in his undesirable gang of lazy, pipe-smoking and whisky-drinking men. Without name, station or standing, they wandered from county to county, from State to State, working a little and loafing a great deal. Yet being well-fed and well-paid and fairly spoken, most of them worked well so long as a sharp young eye was upon them; but it was not long before Dred knew that all complaints, all sullenness, trickery or treachery of any kind could be traced to one Sam Bowen—commonly called Sam Bones, in delicate reference to the prominence of his great elbows, wrists and knees. He had before Dred's arrival asked for and obtained charge of a span of fine mules, making his claim on the ground of his being a Kentucky man, and used to working and caring for those special animals.

From the first Bowen had balked at Hollister for overseer. His knowledge, his alertness irritated him, while the lad's youth was nothing less than a personal

insult. Again and again, Dred had caught the fellow shirking and he suspected him of neglecting his team. Finally he warned him: "Sam Bowen, the next working hour and every working hour, hereafter, that you rob Mr. Stanway of, will be taken out of your wages."

"Out of my wages!" roared Sam. "My fine young cock, what you take out of my pocket, I'll take out'en yer skin!"

"Don't be too sure now, for I'll probably have a word to say about that," returned Dred, with aggravating indifference of manner.

"Yes, you have a damn sight too many words to say about everything," roared Sam Bowen. "You want somebody to larn you to keep your fool tongue quiet 'tween yer teeth!"

"Y-e-s? Well, a few lessons from the same teacher wouldn't do you any harm, Bowen, judging from the senseless row you're making—though I'd hate to be counted in the same class with you!"

Thereupon Bowen had thrown up his great red fists and demanded a fight then and there. Dred made a quick advance toward him, then checked himself and said in a tone of sullen regret: "No, I can't take up any man's dare during work hours. I mean to earn my wages, whatever you may see fit to do!"

"You damn'd snivellin' young coward!" sneered Sam Bowen.

Dred's face was white, his hands clinched, he was

bidding high for self-control. The lad could not know that it was the arrogant Southern blood of his father seeking blindly for expression in his unspoken determination not to lower himself to the level of this noisy brawler, but coldly he replied: "I reckon you know, plumb well, I'm no coward, still if you have doubts, just repeat one little bit of all this to me when my time's my own, and I'll lick hell out of you! Now you take that mule team and follow Hank Brown's lead over to Lima and help bring up that lumber for the new barn!"

For two days Dred's watchful eye kept Sam from loafing—then he came upon him lolling in the shade, smoking. His team was laid up "for a while," as Mr. Stanway permitted no galled or injured beast to work, and one of the mules was shoulder-galled "a right smart."

Dred caught the look of triumphant malice in the fellow's eye and felt there was trickery in this sudden galling, for the recent work had been comparatively light; besides, this was the first instance of injury of the slightest nature that had come to an animal since he had been working on the farm. Suddenly he turned toward the harness-room. Sam Bowen started up, crying: "What are yer goin' in there for?"

"It's none of your infernal business—stand out of the way," and watching anxiously, Sam presently, with many muttered curses, saw Dred Hollister walk-

insult. Again and again, Dred had caught the fellow shirking and he suspected him of neglecting his team. Finally he warned him: "Sam Bowen, the next working hour and every working hour, hereafter, that you rob Mr. Stanway of, will be taken out of your wages."

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ing rapidly to the house carrying a horse-collar with him.

Mr. Stanway was walking up and down the long porch, working his lips nervously, as was his habit when disturbed. He shook his head and sighed as he laid together three letters he had evidently been consulting.

"Ah, Eldred!" he said. "I'll have to ask you to go to Marceline a bit earlier to-day, I'm anxious for my letters, though I dread them too."

"I hope I'm not bringing you bad news, Mr. Stanway," said Dred, with such a repentant expression of face that his employer was forced to laugh a little—though he admitted the letters postmarked Tenn. were all bad, as they were from the doctor attending his only remaining brother, a much older man than himself, whose days he feared were numbered.

"I have not let Ma" (his wife) "nor Amabel know it, but I'm expecting that I'll have to—plumb have to—go down to Tennessee. If Jeff goes, the estate must come into my hands and will necessitate my presence anyway—and then I can't bear to have him die there without one of his kith and kin to hold his hand while he's passing down to the great river. But it's such a devilish trying time to leave home, Lord! Lord! what's a Stanway without a son to lean on! If I only had a boy to take hold and look out for the best interests of the place. Not that I'm finding any fault with my

Amabel—God bless her!—there's not another daughter like her on top of the earth! Lawyer Blair thinks I knuckle down too much to her—but I told him I had to keep on the right side of her, because she controlled my only chance of getting even so much as a son-in-law some day. But good Lord! who is going to take charge here while I'm away? Lawyer Barnes is too far off to do more than drive out once a fortnight. The most trustworthy man around here is Brooks. He's a gentleman as well as a farmer, but his wife is taken bad again, I hear." (Dred made a mental note.) "Sometimes—" he paused and looked so long at Dred that the young fellow shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. "Yes," he resumed, more to himself than to his hearer, "sometimes I'm almost ready to put the whole thing into—What have you got that collar with you for, Eldred?"

The change of subject was sudden but welcome to the young overseer. He swiftly told of the shirking, complaining, and so on, followed by this galling; and then turning the collar over, he asked Mr. Stanway to examine the inside.

"It's been eased with a bit of felt—I see nothing else," said he.

Dred saw the spectacles his employer used in reading lying on the window-sill. He passed them over, saying: "Look with these, sir."

Mr. Stanway did so, and something uncommonly

like a good round oath was frowningly muttered, as by finger and eye he detected in the felt the presence of the cruel long pricklers of both thistle and giant burr.

Every one knew Bob Stanway's love for his livestock, so Dred was not surprised at his outburst of rage: "The cowardly, low-down white! He's jammed a wad of thistles and burrs under the collar and forced that fine animal to pull lumber against it all day! *Damn him!* No wonder it's galled—and all to secure a loafing spell! *Where's my raw-hide?*" He turned and reached behind the door—stopped—calmed himself, and looking keenly at Dred, said: "Well—you were going to say something more, what was it?"

"I was going to ask you, sir, in the first place, if you would authorize me to take the team away from this brute, who has ill-treated it—and—but perhaps you may not care to back my promised punishment for shirking?"

Old Bob Stanway lifted his hand and curtly interrupted: "*You're* overseeing this gang, young man, manage the affair as you think best—I give you authority!" Dred saw dismissal in the stern old face, and taking the collar on his arm, withdrew. Bob Stanway smiled a little, and said: "Now—let's see—let's see!"

* * * * *

Then Dred had gone to the village-post and, returning, had seen the women pitting their puny strength

against the threatening storm, and relying on Bob Stanway's open-handed, generous disposition to back his action, he argued to himself, "So long as I do not halt the work on the farm by taking man or horse from regular service, I'm sure he will be glad to give a neighborly lift to Gallaway in this pinch." So, without waiting to ask permission, he called up Sam Bowen and an overgrown lad who helped about the stable, and telling them to get the old hay wagon and hitch up a scratch team—"Say—well, say your good mule, Sam, and let's see—I reckon Jerry here will have to do." He laughed. "It will be a gay turn-out, but anything at a pinch, to help save a man's grain."

They worked as he was speaking, and as the wagon stood ready, Dred cried gaily: "Up with you, Sam, and take along those rakes, for you can bet your head every rake Gallaway owns is in motion already."

Sam threw the rakes up to the boy Dave, and then stopped: "Hurry man!" cried Dred, "don't you hear that low rumble of thunder? Up with you!"

No one noticed Mr. Stanway coming from the house.

"Devil take you! Do you hear?" shouted Dred.

"Y-a-a-s, I hear—I ain't deaf—but I want'er know wher' you're orderin' me, so fine an' mighty?"

"I'm sending you over to Jason Gallaway's farm to help get in the last of a fine field of wheat, before the storm catches him. He's short-handed—even his

women-folks are out in the field. We must give them a lift—so jump in!”

“N-o-o!” snarled Sam. “Yer don’t find me in no such layout. I won’t go!”

“You *will* go!” said Dred in the level voice his mother would have understood and trembled at. He jumped to the ground and faced the fellow: “See here,” he said, “I don’t want any trouble with you, but you’ve got to work if you want your wages!”

“No, yer bet yer don’t want no trouble with me, so jus’ understand I’m hired to work for old Stanway, an’ I don’t propose ter do no work for any Gallaway crowd, that’s plumb straight!”

“You’ve sold your time to Mr. Stanway,” answered Dred, “and so long as he pays you, you will work wherever he orders you to!”

“Wal, I ain’t had no orders from him yet, and I don’t go on yer say-so!”

“I am Mr. Stanway’s overseer and my orders are simply his!”

“Your orders? Yer clouted brat! Mama’s honey-sweet! me, take an order from *you*, yer whelp without a name——?”

“Put up your hands!” gasped Dred—and the fight was on.

The tanned young giant’s guard might have been too high or too low—he knew naught of scientific fighting, of upper-cuts, of right-hooks or left-hooks,

or jabs or of swings, of side-stepping or feinting—he only knew the old instinctive, prehistoric, straight from the shoulder blow. The man with the punch wins, and this lad's punch had the steam in it of his clean young strength unimpaired by whisky, tobacco or late hours. Sam Bowen was a rough-and-tumble fighter, and not above using knee or elbow or doing even worse.

Dred was not a pleasant sight and the sickening sound of bare knuckles smashing against human flesh was making a certain accidental young witness very faint and trembly.

Dred, catching a hard blow on the ear and a second on the mouth, was yet conscious that Bowen was trying to foul him, and thought triumphantly, "He must feel he's getting worsted, to stoop to that."

Suddenly a stern voice cried: "Ah! you brute! don't gouge, fight fair!"

The guilty man started—for one instant turned his eyes in the direction of that condemning voice. His guard was lowered. With a straight right-punch, Dred caught him under the jaw—partly turned and flung him from his feet to the ground.

Then Dred stepped to a horse-bucket and scooping up some water held it to his bleeding mouth and nose. When Bowen moved, he sprang back and leaning over him asked: "More?"

"N-a-a-w," was the drawled answer, "not now—'nother time, I'll——"

"No!" sharply put in Dred. "There'll be no other time! We will fight this thing out now for good and all! Either get up and go to work—or get up and fight, and be quick about it! Do you want more?"

"N-a-a-w—you've got longer spurs than I thought yer had." He got up, rubbed his jaw a bit and clambered into the wagon.

"I'm ordering you to Gallaway's, you know?" said Dred.

"Uh—huh!" grunted the man.

"You may be kept late."

"Not over-time—yer don't get no over-time outen me—not ter save no man's craps!"

Mr. Stanway, watching and listening, suddenly took on an anxious look.

"Not," asked Dred, calmly, "if you are paid well for the extra time?"

"Naw—not ter save all yer necks—I wouldn't work over-time!"

"Well," sighed Dred, "you are within your rights there—if you won't, you won't! You'll have to skip along lively now to be of any use over there!" and so the wagon rattled at last out of the yard and down the lane.

Dred held his head between his hands and thought suddenly what an object he must be. "Oh, Amabel

—how can I bear it if you shudder away from me! Confound it, will my nose never stop bleeding—and my mouth is already like a puff-ball! If she laughs at me—I'll go out and kill that brute! He has nearly scraped my shins bare—but at least they don't show! Oh, I must get a clean shirt! Oh, Lord, ain't I getting stiff!"

And up at the house—stealing in at the back-door—innocently setting down a basket of eggs, as a result of a personal egg-hunt at the barn, Amabel, the beautiful, with lustrous eyes all ablaze and cheeks a-flush, startled her mother with the cry: "Oh, Mammy, dear! what a splendid thing is a man's strength! How can a woman ever love and marry a poor creature all run to brains?"

"But, my little 'Bel, you could not marry a man without brains—he could not possibly be a gentleman unless——"

Amabel silenced her with a kiss, and ran up to her own room, where she burst into tears, crying: "And I can't even bathe his poor face and head, unless he asks me to! 'Hulda's Brat'—oh, what a drubbing you gave and took! You great splendid thing! To think of *your* raving over Keats—just because he could play with pretty words and make pictures with them! Am I a very primitive sort of girl, I wonder? Anyway I know those powerful hands of his can be gentle as any woman's—and as he, silent and alert, fought that

snarling, grunting, cursing thing to-day—I thought, oh, if he ‘had,’ how strong he would be ‘to hold,’ the woman of his choice! I wish I knew if he really does meet that blue-eyed thing at Granny Gallaway’s?”

And Mr. Stanway rubbed his hands as he walked up and down the harness-room floor, saying again and again: “Good! *good!* there’s a sense of justice in that young fellow! No boasting, no cock-a-doodle-do! I was afraid he might try to drub that ornery cuss into doing over-time—but no! He saw the rights of the fellow and yielded. But, by Jupiter! he licked him into obedience on the other question! Eldred Hollister needs only a bit of education to become a mighty fine fellow. As it is, he’s naturally clever, thoughtful, honest! Plucky too, without being hot-headed—and I—yes, I’ll do it!”

He looked at his letter—his eyes filled: “Poor Jeff!” he sighed, “I must try to get to him in time—and I must prepare Ma and my girlie, and explain the business with Masker and——” He stepped to the door and called: “Eldred!”

Poor Dred! covered with shame at his condition, came slowly toward him.

Mr. Stanway said: “I’m summoned to Tennessee, and I shall have to ask you to stay and take entire charge here during my absence. A bit giddy? Well, you’ve had a pretty lively bout! Sit down here and rest—and I’ll explain everything to you.”

CHAPTER XIII

The Birth and Christening of C. Masker

It had been a trifle over two years before that one C. Masker or, more commonly speaking, "Corneel Masker," having reached the end of his tether in an attack of delirium tremens, and being slated by family and doctor for retirement in a certain institution known generally as "Drunkards' Home," was having a final talk with an old and close friend who, traveling away from home for his country's good more than his own pleasure, had turned up quite by chance that bleak March morning.

"Charlie," said the trembling, broken Masker, "I'm sorry you've had a slip-up. Your people ought to be looking out for you, after all the good whisky you've run in and out for them; all the duties you've dodged for them. But, I say, damn the whole gang of inspectors, collectors, *et al.*! Do you remember that customs official who went back on me for that jealous little red-headed Nettie Wild, who gave away the whole beautiful job in one of her tantrums? Say, you saved me that time from the nip of the darbies, by getting me across the river at Detroit—when I was in no condition to help myself. I've never evened up

with you for that, but I am going to do it now—that is, if I can. I haven't got a red cent—but, look here, you've been a smart agent for a whisky house; now, why can't you become as good an agent for those new reapers and threshers for Follinsbee & Smith? I'm out of it for good, so why can't you become C. Masker? What? Too dangerous? too many people to deceive? I didn't mean for you to assume my personality. I mean, why can't you be a Charles Masker—my brother? You need a name and a position. Look—here are my note books—my route—customers—what's due and when. Here's a list of fellows that were wavering—here's a few black-listed names. Now, I'll give you every possible tip—then instead of sending all this stuff and my resignation into the firm, do you, as my brother, quietly take my place. In three weeks you'll be due to report to the bosses at Springfield; then you can show what you've done and tell them how greatly you are in need of a situation and——”

“Not by a long shot!” laughed Charlie. “The 'umble isn't my game. If I'm to play to win, I'll make my report in the character of a man who, at some inconvenience to himself, has taken his brother's place, rather than let the firm suffer any loss of trade. Having shown my benevolent consideration for their welfare, I shall hope they have an experienced man ready for the place—a good friendly talker, since many sales are just hanging, waiting for the final word of

enticement from the clever agent. Then I'll start to leave—but they will haul me back and offer me the situation and with it a bit more wage in addition. Ha! ha!"

The original Masker cackled a feeble response: "Lord! Charlie, but you've got the cheek! Say" (eagerly), "have you got anything about you, eh? Yes? For God's sake, bolt the door and give me just a sip! Quick!"

Charlie, while obeying warned: "I've only got a coffee-berry to hide the smell!"

"Ah, bah! what do I care! They'll have me to the right-about's to-morrow—but to-day—" He eagerly drained the drink poured from the pocket-flask, then spilled a little water into the glass, dipped his fingers, and dashing the sprinkles into his friend's face, he cried: "With whisky and water and good tobacco, I baptize you, Charles Masker—successor in business to your dear brother, Cornelius Masker!"

And all had happened as C. Masker had predicted. Charlie had made so fine a showing at the end of his three weeks of self-assumed probation, that Follinsbee & Smith had offered permanent work at an advanced salary.

Now, judging from the character which gossip gave to C. Masker, one might be justified in imagining him the cheaply over-dressed, over-scented, hair-oiled, barber's joy—a country Don Juan. But that would be a

far cry from the real appearance of the man. Always of stalwart figure, he was now, to his great humiliation, putting on flesh; was, indeed, dangerously near that convexity of line that old ladies termed "portly." Yet there was such quickness, such lightness in his movements, that they were fain to remark, "He was mighty peart and spry too, on his feet, considerin' his heft."

His garments were plain, but wearing habitually the full complement of articles generally considered necessary to the complete clothing of a man, he seemed by contrast with even the hickory shirt, the jean trousers, and the matched galluses of the Sunday caller, a veritable howling swell. Though 'Lonzo was observant enough to arrive at the conclusion that the store goods "warn't so doggon'd much better'n what Brooks and Stanway wore, but it war the way Masker packed hisse'f inside of his duds, an' then acted like he didn't hav' nothin' on at all. So easy an' nat'ral like that, an' the fit of his coats war from smoothness acrost his shoulders—plumb like the bark on a tree."

Those indispensable acquirements of the rural beau, pomade and perfume, did not exist for him; nor dye—now. Though once he had listened to the dulcet voice of the tempting dealer in rejuvenating tonics and "stains," and had gone forth with the blackness of ink upon his hair—a black that only shaded to green when looked at from a certain angle; and might

have gone on happily dyeing, had he not overheard such a very pretty girl remark to her sister, as a traveler descended from the omnibus: "Did you notice how gray he is? Does it not make him look young?"

"Yes," replied the addressed one, "how dye would cheapen him. Gray hair is so distinguished looking, and yet Papa——"

"Oh," frowned the first, "is not Papa a sight half the time! Why will he do it—every one knows that he dyes! Mama told him yesterday that if she were gone, he would never get a second wife until he proposed with a head as clean at least as his face and hands. It is so horrid marking up everything!"

A half-hour later Mr. Charles Masker was goading to frenzy a tonsorial artist, in his demand that all faintest trace of green-black dye should be removed at one fell shampooing. So now C. Masker's thick dark hair was lightly frosted at either temple with silvery threads, and the result justified the unknown chatter-box's opinion—it was refining, even dignifying.

As to the manners of the man, they varied, as a successful commercial traveler's must. In that respect he was very nearly all things to all men. He could clown with the rustic—deal curtly and briefly with the taciturn—allow any amount of rope to the man who dickered and haggled; while a certain joviality that was natural to him made his company exhilarating to them all.

With women he just missed being a gentleman. He was courteous, deferential, gay, tender, but a mere trifle flamboyant. 'Lonzo had failed to state which "queen" he alluded to when he declared Masker's bow was "to her taste"; and the grace of that quick click of heels, that bend from the hip, that sweep of the arm—and it really was graceful—must have been a bit over-emphasized for the taste of most queens. Yet there was force, there was ardor in the man, and he was too perfect physically to lack brute courage. He had, too, the power that comes of a fixed idea. He worshiped but one God—himself. He had but one object in life—his own pleasure. Absolutely without moral perceptions, he destroyed souls gaily, without malice, much as a roguish, laughing child destroys flies on the sunny window-pane. Never was his standard carried too high for men to read his true device thereon—*Mon plaisir*, while a good-humored recognition of his own weakness was shown in his answer to a question: "What three words in the English language are the hardest-worked?"

"Speaking for my individual self," he said, "the three sweetest and hardest-worked words are, I, ME, MINE."

An egotist, then, from the lower middle class, seemed this Charles Masker, who was so successfully filling the place of his "afflicted brother, Corneel." Stopping at Grandam Gallaway's, he was told to

“com’ agin, as Nash was over to the covered bridge, doing his stint of road-mending there,” and, said Masker: “She got up then from fixing the fire under her soap-kettle and she fell to staring at me in the witchiest way, and not a word more could I get out of her. Holy St. Denis! she looked as if she were asleep with her eyes open!”

And she, who had been Rebekah Arata, and in order to surely legalize her marriage before the Methodist minister, had jumped the broomstick with her young husband, Azariah Gallaway, reported the visit at supper-time and added, slowly: “Y-a-a-s, an’ I had a spell, Nash.”

“Did you, Mother?”

“Y-a-a-s, I shorely did.” She smoked into the wide chimney and absently felt of the gold beads at her brown old throat: “Nash, don’t yer never see ther mist—don’t it never shet som’ un off sometimes all white—sometimes mucky—sometimes—sometimes *red*? No? No, I reckon not! You’re plumb Gallaway an’ don’t hav’ no truck with sich Arata doin’s—tho’ God knows yer all Rom ter look at! I didn’t see that feller’s hand to-day—the mist caught me so suddent, but when I saw the laughin’, dancin’ devils lookin’ at me putten his eyes, I said to myse’f, ‘He’s blazed his trail thro’ life—any one can foller his track by ther shame of fergotten women—for the birth-sperit give him two pow-

ers, Nash, no female woman can buck ag'in—the gift o' gab, an' the com' hither eye!"

"He's a big, strong, fine-lookin' chap, they say," remarked Nash, who distinctly shrank from any suggestion of the unusual or uncanny in his mother.

But she went on dreamily: "Y-a-as, he looks strong, but all men don't empty the cup. This man will set it down half full. But, yer see, ther mist gather'd and—and—I didn't see his hands—or I'd——"

"Mother!" exclaimed Nash, sharply, and with a start she came back to herself and the immediate duty of washing and setting away the pink cups and plates, and of hanging her immaculate dish-pan and cloth outside of the kitchen door.

There were those who thought that C. Masker would do well to step softly along a very straight path while making his progress through Adams County, as the Sheriff looked upon him with a baleful eye; he being of kin to that Hinckley of Calhoun County, whose girl had gone wrong for a traveling chap, by name, Masker, so of course this was the fellow. But as it happened, just once in his life this man under the assumed name was better than his reputation; and a slight attention to detail, a separating of provable facts from the loose statements of scandal-mongers would have established *the fact* that the guilty man was the sequestered Cornelius Masker, not this Charles of the same surname. In truth, this life-long follower

of "The light that lies in woman's eyes," this almost professional maker of love, had for a couple of years experienced a great indifference. Chill had coldly run along his nerves when noting the steady pulse, the regular heart-beat in presence of temptation. He had asked himself: "Is this a sign of approaching age; am I already growing old? *Oh, mon Dieu—ne pas cela!*" he groaned in quaking dread.

There are those who firmly believe that by the like of man's own dearest sin, he shall be flayed and punished in this world, here! He that wields the sword—shall feel the sword! He who swindles and defrauds—shall be stripped bare by fraud; and thus it came about that this man, so long a scourge to women, found himself the helpless abject slave of the cruellest form of love—the desperate blind passion of age for youth! If for the arming of this young maid he had woven all his broken vows into one stout thong and hardened it in brine of countless tears, the blows could not have cut more deeply than did the cool and careless glance of Amabel, the beautiful!

Her languorous eyes, the peach-like tints of her coloring, the generous curves of her sound young body, her grace of movement, unheard-of charm in a country girl, had aroused in him a swift, strong passion that shook his selfish heart to the core. He wondered if his cheap conquests had given him the air of a conquering hero, that he so often saw mocking laughter

in the eyes that were at once his torment and his joy?

The man knew naught of the love that spells sacrifice; naught of the dignity of self-control; was utterly without reverence for her sex. With him love meant the blind, overpowering desire of the male for his natural mate. If he could have fought for the possession of this young Hebe, it would have filled him with fiercest joy, for, though he had the Northern city man's dislike for fire-arms, he was a savage fighter with nature's weapons, and had trusted to them through all his wanderings.

For the first time then, in his come-easy, go-easy life he suffered! There had been times when Amabel had curtly rejected some proffered service of his, then such hot stinging pains had pierced his eyeballs, that he shrank with shame, lest tears were rising there; and when he saw the swift soft color of her cheek deepen suddenly to rose at the approaching footsteps of that great *cut*, with the chill stern glance of—of some one, somewhere seen before, he could have beaten his own head against the wall, simply for change of pain.

With mistaken hospitality, Mrs. Stanway, to Amabel's surprise, had invited Mr. Masker to stay at the farm while he transacted his business in the village, a course of action that had caused much unfavorable comment throughout the settlement, as he was held to be sharp as a steel trap, good at a deal or telling a

yarn, but no fit character to visit your women folks, and they were: "Doggon'd sure old Bob Stanway wouldn't have given him no house room, though he did plumb-top everybody else in buying of him! 'Twas said the Brat had balked and kicked, too, ag'in him—but Mrs. Stanway 'lowed she could run the house without any help. But it did seem like she were head-in' all ter seed to act so."

The invitation had come about in this way: Masker startled by the sudden bolting of a young filly under training, exploded into French exclamations, at which Mrs. Stanway had fairly fallen into hysterics of pure joy. For in great part that had been the language of her girlhood's home in New Orleans, and hearing it now seemed to bring back the sweetness and grace of that far-away time before the young Tennessean had taken her fancy captive and carried her off to his grim mountains. So it was for her own pleasure she had invited Masker to stay at the farm, and though she saw how things were, she thought comfortably: "Nothing can come of it and he will be leaving in a few days anyway." So she went on, coaxing her stumbling, uncertain tongue to make answer to Masker's voluble flattery, in the dear, once familiar language of the French quarter at home.

Fined down by overwork and by the anxiety attending grave responsibility, and by the strain of mental effort in learning to read, Dred Hollister's young

face was tense and rather drawn. Tall, straight and supple, strong, lean and brown, he looked a youth trained to the minute for some physical struggle in an arena. Indeed he worked as it is not given to many men to work, sustained by the tender love for Amabel that was so blent with reverence that his own eyes were not yet open to the fierce compelling passion that underlay it all.

One day in Mr. Stanway's room—half-den or office and half-library—Dred had found a drawer, nearly full of dusty battered old school books. On the fly-leaf of one after another, there was scrawled:

“Steal not this book for fear of shame—
For in it is the owner's name.

Jefferson Stanway.”

But beneath would regularly appear in a worse hand:

“Steal not this book for fear of shame,
Though it's a lie about the name!

It's Robert Stanway's.”

While three years later in a very correct and delicate writing, appeared:

“Steal not this book, dear gentle youth,
Because it now belongs to Ruth—Stanway.”

No wonder the books were battered and inked and dog-eared—after being used by a whole family of Stanways; and Dred, having received the liberty of the library, carried in triumph to little May—who more

often than her mother—was his teacher now, a thin old speller and a very early reader. And so rapidly did he learn, that he could now smile instead of writhe at the laugh May had had upon him once, when desiring to test his knowledge of letters she had taken him out to the barnyard, and pointing to some white letters painted upon the side of the red boards, he had slowly, somewhat hesitatingly repeated, “M-a-c-h-i-n-e.”

“Good! good!” cried the child, excitedly. “And oh, dear Mr. Dred! *do* you know what that spells?”

He started to say: “No, dear, I don’t know,” but he was tempted—and he fell. He looked the big red thing over and with much *aplomb*, stated: “M-a-c-h-i-n-e spells threshers, May.”

The meetings of Eldred Hollister and Selina Marsh had not failed to attract attention. Few people more utterly ignore the command, “Judge not!” than do country men and for all their bovine stolidity of expression, there is one thought their sluggish minds can evolve quickly—suspicion. In this case the asperities of farm and village gossip had been considerably softened by the invariable presence of little May at all these “doggon’d queer meetin’s, up in roads an’ orchards an’ God knows wher’ all!” One scanty slab-sided lady, whose two scanty cotton garments kept her safely within the law dealing with the compulsory clothing of adult humanity, remarked, while tying a piece of fat pork about a hoe-cut toe—“pork fat

drawin' out pizen mos' as good as snake ile, which is kinder skeerce"—that "that Seliny Marsh of Gallaway's mout be'a fishin' for Huldys Brat for a match with that likely young-un of hern, gals runnin' up inter female women 'fore yer could mor'n bat yer eyes twict!" And the friend who had "packed 'er 'cross the fields for a little chin," "lowed that it mout be so, for her old man had seen the Brat sittin' out with the young-un at Grandam Gallaway's, an' everybody knew Seliny Marsh war away workin' for the Brookses, but" (with a puff at her corn-cob pipe), "it seem'd ter her more, that Huldys Brat was more like them other young fellers, who was allers fallin' in love with and sparkin' widders. Yes, she war plumb sure it wer' a case of courtin' the kitten for ther sake of the cat."

These remarks reaching Amabel's ears, she thought: "Ah, that accounts then for his sacrifice of the Sunday reading of Keats in the orchard! Sacrifice, indeed! to prefer the company of a little girl like that to mine, just because she is her blue-eyed mother's daughter! Oh!" and straightway Amabel, the piqued, the foolish, had turned to Masker with gracious interest and kindness, had stood before the dulcimer, explaining the strange instrument and playing old-fashioned airs—to please him? Oh, no! to wound Dred! But as she swayed slightly to the rhythm of the music, her small hands hovering over the metal plates and strings, striking them quick, light blows with her little playing

sticks, they were in their swift fluttering like a pair of white butterflies tossing above a flower-bed, and this fair young maker of mischief had no faintest knowledge that her new kindness, her nearer presence, was turning the blood of the older man to fire and filling him with such mad hopes and daring plans as would have stricken her dumb with horror.

All his self-confidence revived. To his monstrous vanity, this polite attention became coy encouragement. For certain legal claims upon him elsewhere and for those who held them, he had no thought, no care! The world was wide! This girl was beautiful, fascinating, imperious! Her glance could sting like the lash of a whip, but her smile warmed like wine. Yes, the world was wide enough to hide in and laws were made to be broken! If he could but secure this girl, win, capture, *abduct!* What mattered the way, so long as he held the captive of his bow and spear! Thinking such mad folly, his ears began to buzz, and his hot hands trembled nervously.

Dred, with chill steady glance, noted all that passed and Amabel, the foolish, was robbed of triumph because she could not see the suffering his calm face masked.

At last the elderly Don Juan grew too free of speech, and in expressing a desire to see Amabel in a party-gown, he referred to the certain beauty of her neck and arms and the probable existence of a kissable dimple at the shoulder.

Dred rose, and stepping within the room, stood by Mrs. Stanway, and asked with a nod toward the veranda: "Shall I put him off the place?"

Angered by Masker's presumption, she was doubly vexed that Dred should have witnessed it, and with inconsequential peevishness, she made answer with: "My dear young man, who and what do you think you are?"

"I'm nobody at present—but I mean to be a faithful servant to my employer. Mrs. Stanway, please call your daughter in, or——" and she called Amabel sharply.

Dred, on his way out for his nightly round of inspection, passed Masker, preparing to smoke, who, with half-laughing contempt, cried: "Cub!" and without a pause Dred answered, with back-drawn lip: "Beast!"

Masker, laughing outright, bowed with a flourish, quoting, "Compliments pass where gentle-folk meet!" but Dred, looking over his shoulder with narrowing eyes, said, "You mistake, the gentle-folk are all inside!" and went his way, while he who called himself Masker stared until the flame of the match caught his fingers, then he started, exclaiming: "Where the devil?—I almost had him then, when he narrowed his eyes like that! There's some face in the past, this jealous boy's is like—an angry face—with narrowing eyes. Oh, well, it will place itself some time, in a flash when I least expect it!"

CHAPTER XIV

May's Strange Find

When Selina Parsell Marsh had gone to work for the Brookses much unpleasant comment had followed. Every one resentfully felt that Catharine Gallaway had injured the reputation of the county for hospitality, in allowing this of her own blood and kin, and she a widow too, who had come from land's end to visit her, and had taken such willing hold too, to help with all the work, cooking, cleaning, washing, churning—"in fact you couldn't put nothing past her that she warn't ready to give a hist to. An' it war plumb ornery an' low down to let her own kinfolk work out for pay. An' it jest seem'd that Catharine Gallaway grew meaner an' meaner as they jined acre to acre—an' this 'ere was mighty nigh as mean as holdin' old Azariah Gallaway outen his grave, an' a good honest man he was an' one that laid out well, too, havin' been took quick, an' not wasted nor caved none to speak of. 'Twas a wonder Granny Gallaway, bein' of gypsy breed, leastways she shorely was a half-breed anyway you mout put it, the wonder was she hadn't put no spell on to Kate, to pay her off, but she hadn't. She hadn't even thrown a colic on to a horse, or dried up a cow.

Perhaps 'cause of Jason bein' own son to her—for the Lord knew she had power equal to airy nigger voodoo doctor sellin' charms under cover of corn-plasters, but you wouldn't catch her turnin' nò vis'tor out to work for pay!"

And, indeed, the hearty hospitality of these hard-working; plain-living people was a really beautiful thing; and the cheery "Won't yer 'light?" came as quickly when there was but corn-bread and milk to offer, as when pork, sweet potatoes, "riz" biscuits and coffee were at hand. No stranger might pass without an invite to bait and water his beast, while "he draw'd up an' had a bite hisself," while the empty old Spanish formula "My house is yours," became reality in case of visiting kinfolk. And no greater affront could be offered by the stranger than to suggest paying: "For all, God's word, as if they wer' runnin' a tavern, an' a bar-room."

Yes, a hospitable people and as a community injured, they thought, by Catharine Gallaway's conduct. Jason had seemed really shocked when Selina first proposed going to Mrs. Brooks, saying that harvest being over, she was not needed, but money was; and this was her first chance to earn some.

Jason, red to his little bright eyes, dragged at his beard and rumbled that: "He 'lowed ther' was money 'nough for her wants, as she was shorely one of the family."

Kate's haste to crush his foot warningly was so great it made her action clumsily apparent to every one, and in the dreadful pause, 'Lonzo said, absently and as to himself: "'Oh, I see!' cried the blind man, 'that a wink is as good as a nod to a blind horse!' Ah, a sad thing to be blind—must be," and he drew a dismal cry from his cheap and dreadful fiddle—that was what he called it. "No, May," he had said, "this is not a violin—violins make music, but they cannot *skreek*. Now this fiddle can. No violin on earth could raise goose-flesh on your arms as this *skreek* up in G can. Sweet, isn't it?"

"My!" answered May. "Sounds like a cat."

"Naturally—cause these strings used to be the inner innards of a gray cat with a white face. Now shall we have: 'Jordan's Stormy Banks,' or 'Old Jim Crow'?"

Next day Selina, hunting for eggs in the hay, heard a few words as Jason and Kate, in close conversation, passed beneath her. Jason was saying as they entered: "I don't believe she'd make no fuss at all!" but Kate angrily interrupted, "No, I won't! not if she was a hundred times kin of mine! Have you gone plumb mad, Jason Gallaway—or have yer been gittin' religion? It's too late now—so you keep still an' think of your own family! Let her go to Brooks', if she likes, they can't tell what they don't know—an' then we can settle up about—" and they passed out, going toward the house.

Selina was both hurt and angry, yet she attached little importance to the words. Her sister was not only jealous but evidently secretive, "and," thought Selina, "her condition of health seems to intensify all her worst qualities. I suppose Jay suggested my living on here as one of the family, and she thinks it's too late for such an arrangement. But what on earth did she mean about the Brooks? Oh, well, I shall go. Money I must have, if only to get away from this place with. But I am sorry Mrs. Brooks is too nervous to have May in the house. She will have to stay here, and poor child! she will feel herself unwelcome. But Mother will give her a kind word now and then and she will be safe, perfectly safe." Yet, even as she spoke, she recalled 'Lonzo's description of the man who would come there to collect a last payment on the thresher and to bargain over a reaper. The big, good-humored man of Frenchified manners, whose courage was his only good trait. Again she felt the terror that shook her when in her dream C. Masker had turned to her the ever-smiling face of Charles Paul Laval. She accused herself of rank superstition and declared that her fear of the man whom she had once called husband was becoming a monomania.

But reason as she would, she could not conjure away her irrational dread of Mr. Masker, the traveling agent, and finally before leaving she took May out for a walk, and when they were quite alone, she drew the

grieving child to her knee as she sat on a log and began, "May, I have something very particular to say to you. If a strange man comes here before I get back you must not let him see you."

The child's face turned perfectly livid with terror; her little hands fluttered up to her throat, as she gasped: "Is't—oh, Mother, has he found us here?"

"May! May! don't be so frightened. I don't think, dear, this is he—the one you fear so, only we must be very careful when any one comes from the big cities. He might be a friend of that person and write to him—don't you see, dear? Now look at me and stop shaking. Kiss me, so, and be the brave little girl you used to be at home. Now listen. You go often to Grandam Gallaway's to help Dred Hollister, and if this strange man, Mr. Masker, comes here, you must slip out the back way through the orchard and run to her house."

"Without leave?" asked May, anxiously.

"Yes, without leave from any one!"

"Aunt Catharine might notice and be very angry?" sagely suggested the observant May.

"I hardly think so—but if she does notice you will just have to endure patiently, even if—if—" Selina's face grew fierce and her clasp tightened. "She will scarcely venture so far, but my darling, even if she whips you you must endure it rather than have that man get a fair look at you. And should bad luck

bring him here at meal-time, you—oh, baby girl—to teach you to lie, but what else can I do, dear—then you must go and creep into your grandmother's bed, and be sick if any one looks for you! Sick from green fruit or—or headache. I will tell God, on my knees, the lie was mine—only, dear, you must be quick, and clever and brave and endure anything, rather than see that man who—who might be—Can I trust you, dear?"

May drew herself up, smoothed her little apron and swallowing once or twice at the lump that troubled her throat, answered: "Yes, Mama, I'll be very careful. I'll run to Granny's or—or I'll be sick in my own grandma's bed—and not eat anything at all. Aunt may scold dreadful, but" (her face reddening swiftly) "I hope she won't whip me! Oh, I hope she won't!"

"So do I, dear," continued Selina, then somewhat jestingly, "but you have had so many whippings in your life, it would be nothing very new?"

The child pressed her cheek to her mother's passionately, saying: "I know, Mama, but that was you, and I wasn't shamed! But if Aunt strikes me I'll feel just like old Watch, when he gets whipped sometimes."

Selina's helpless tears fell on her child's face as she alternately kissed and cautioned her. A poor little lonely frightened maid, she left behind her!

So it came about that C. Masker laughed heartily

when coming up the road from Jason Gallaway's, he stopped at Grandam's to see Nash, and a small girl with a screech and a bound had gone literally flying out of the back door, tearing away toward the wood behind the barn, wildly pursued by the stiff old sheep-dog. "That's queer" he said, "I don't usually frighten children."

"Oh," innocently replied the old woman, "it warn't you, stranger. Old Esau had to drive some strange sheep outen ther' t'other day, an' he's been seein' things movin' in them woods ever since. The young'un thinks he's tellin' the truth an' she goes rippin' after him."

"Oh," he murmured lightly. "Well, this time the girl must have seen things, for she was in the lead. Ah! how do you do, Mr. Gallaway?" (turning to Nash) "Nice bit of tobacco over there—how does it do in this soil?" and the child and her fright were forgotten; but just within the edge of the woods, May lay limp on the cool damp earth while Esau nosed at her, licking her face and hands and whining piteously—for as she had bounded out of the house, she heard that laugh, a remembered laugh, and dropping in her frightened little tracks, she fainted from sheer terror.

Her Grandmother Parsell plucked up courage enough that night to declare her real sick, and took her, under a shower of sneers from Kate, into her own bed, where kisses and cuddling so comforted the child, that

she soon slept, and morning found her calm and brave—but doubly watchful. Only wishing, wishing she dared write to her mother. That was what she called it, though truth to tell, May's writing was two-thirds printing. Still, as she could read simple sentences in a plain and distinct hand, she felt justified in speaking of herself as one who could write.

Dred Hollister in particular, was much impressed with the erudition of his young teacher, who was always considerate of his feelings, when trying to guide him in the way he should go. For he had some peculiar methods of expressing himself about lessons.

Whenever a word had a double letter he would twice pronounce it instead of saying "double e" or "double r," as in "t-r-e-e," instead of "t-r-double e." One day he said c-o-o-l, and May very delicately observed: "I s'pose things are different with grown-ups, but when you're just children at school, you have to say 'double o' for that word 'cool,' and 't-r-double e' for tree. Perhaps grown-ups like the other way better?"

But Dred assured her the school rule must be the correct one for him to follow. Then he would speak of words as "jointed" and was in a state of proud delight when he first reached the "two-jointed words," and again came that deprecating, "perhaps it's different with grown-ups, but children's words can't never be 'jointed,' they have to be syllabused." Oh, May!

While Dred toiled over his lessons, goaded on by

his longing for knowledge and his passionate desire to lift himself nearer to Amabel, she was blaming him for his cold neglect of certain opportunities, and she heartily wished her father home again, since Dred no longer even joined her in her rides; because he could not leave the men. She hated the men, she declared, and wished the corn was ripe and safely cribbed, so they might be sent away. The only present comfort was that, that presuming Mr. Masker had gone, and so suddenly that Mrs. Stanway, much vexed, declared that no Southern man would have left so abruptly a house whose hospitality he had enjoyed, and that after all his French was not like that spoken by the Lenoirs of New Orleans; there was some sort of *patois* about it. Very likely it was only Canadian French after all.

One day during Selina's absence, Jason took his children down to the "bottoms" with him to see his brother Nash's family and to quietly talk over the purchase price, money down, of a farm there, that his very soul longed for. But for certain reasons this matter had never been mentioned during Selina's visit, and, according to Kate, even May "was too dog-gon'd quick at noticin' things to be taken along," and so she remained at home, and sat by her grandmother, and knit on the wedding garters.

Kate had gone across the road to the barn, believing from their mournful cries that some young turkeys were in trouble, as they generally were, when she heard a

horse approaching at a hard gallop and, looking down the road, exclaimed: "What dumgasted luck! Jason waited two days for him to come tax collectin', an' now here he is, an' looks like he's in the devil's own hurry."

She proved a good guesser, for James Brown called out at sight of her: "Mis' Gallaway! oh, Mis' Gallaway! I can't 'light, ain't got time. I want ter get back to Ursa worst way. Will yer jest hist out Gallaway's taxes quick's yer can, ter oblige?"

Kate found fence climbing laborious work in those days, and knowing she would be both clumsy and slow, with a face reddening with annoyance, she called loudly to May. The surprised child came running to her aunt, who crossly ordered her to move lively now and go open the little hair trunk by her bed, where in the left-hand corner she would find a small canvas bag, with the neck tied about with a string. She was not to dare to open it, but was to bring it out to her, "an' not let any grass grow under her feet in doin' it, either."

May, obeying, dashed into the room where Grandmother Parsell sat knitting, and pulling up the top of the little hair-covered, brass-tacked trunk, looked in the left-hand corner, but saw no canvas bag. She plunged her hand in and felt for it—in vain. Deadly afraid of her aunt, she grew excited and began to pull things up to look beneath them. Tears came to her

eyes. "What shall I do?" she cried. "Grandmother, this *is* my left hand, isn't it?"

"Look at the other end," advised Grandma, who guessed the child's errand. "Perhaps Catharine has made a mistake."

Again the child sought the bag and found it, just as an angry cry of "May! what are yer *doin'*?" reached her, and leaving the trunk's contents in wild confusion, May rushed out carrying the bag to her aunt, who snatched it from her, saying ungraciously: "I might better have gone for it myse'f, slow-poke!"

But Tax Collector Brown reached down and patted May's head, saying: "Oh, I don't know, 'pears to me she moves purty lively for a slow-poke. Nice little gal, Mis' Gallaway—whose mout she be?"

The child smiled gratefully up at him, but knowing her presence was obnoxious to her aunt, she turned back to the house and hurried to the trunk to try and put things right before its condition could be discovered. Several small bags of seeds were out on the floor, a daguerreotype had fallen from the silk handkerchief in which it had been rolled, and a thin bundle of papers and letters, very yellow and smelling very musty, had slipped from the loose pink tape-band about them. May, neatly folding the wearing apparel up, came suddenly upon a tiny object that wrung a cry of admiration from her lips: "Oh, Grandma,

whose doll was that for?—oh, how sweet!” and she held upon her closed hand a tiny white cap.

“Put it back, quick!” said Grandma.

“Yes, m’am, but oh, how I wish I could have some wee little caps, just like it.”

Grandma smiled a queer little smile and answered: “Probably you will have—if you wait long enough.”

“Oh, do you think so!” rejoiced the child. “I will be so glad!” and returned to her work. As she picked up the scattered papers to tie up again she slowly read the addresses on the letters: “Miss Kate Parsell, why, who’s that?” then she remembered and laughed—it sounded so funny instead of Kate Gallaway. Then a paper with a big word, “B-o-u-n-d-a-r-i-e-s,” and lots of figures and the short word, “acres,” appearing very often. Then a letter—on long white paper that began so queerly, “In the name of God, Amen,” just like the end of a prayer. Such a funny letter, and it was signed by three different people, and it said it was a “Will of William Parsell,” and down in the middle were lots of Parsells’ names: “Sarah and Selina, and John and Catharine. Altogether a very funny letter with red seals and things.

Then when they were nicely put together, she saw one had fallen just under the bed and she scrambled after it, and wiping the dust off she looked at it too. “My!” she cried—then again “My!” for on this paper somebody did solemnly swear to the death of Selina

Parsell. A sound made her look up. Kate, with a young turkey in her apron was slowly climbing the fence. May thrust the things into the trunk and closed the lid.

When Kate had placed the turkey in a basket and set it in the kitchen, she came into the living-room, and turning suspicious eyes on her niece, asked: "What kept you so long gettin' that money—were yer prowlin' 'mong my things? What did yer see in the trunk?"

Grandma ventured: "Catharine, you were mistaken about where you put the bag—it was not in the left corner, and I had to tell her to feel in the other."

"Yes!" snapped Catharine, "just like the fool. Wouldn't have sense enough to look anywhere else, without bein' told!" She jerked up the cover and glanced inside, then felt for the papers, and seeming to be satisfied, dropped the matter.

But later in the day May asked: "Grandma—my mama was Selina Parsell, wasn't she?"

"Yes, dear."

"Well, being married isn't like being dead, is it?"

"Don't be foolish, child, you know better than that."

"Well," persisted May, "please, Grandma, is there any Selina Parsell that's dead?"

Grandma nearly jumped out of her chair: "N-n-o—I don't know'er—what do you mean?" she whispered.

"How many Selina Parsells were there at the very

first, Grandma? My mama's one—and that paper in the trunk says one is dead, and——”

A trembling old hand was laid over her mouth: “For God's sake, for God's sake, keep quiet!” Then she asked tremulously: “Can you read writing? Yes? Oh!”—she rocked back and forth. “I told her to make a clean breast of it! I told her it would come out!” Then drawing the bewildered child to her, she charged her not to breathe a word about the papers she had seen—and May promised. But again and again she heard the old woman murmur, as she shook her head: “Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings——”

Next morning, when May carried a large darning-needle to 'Lonzo to mend the lining of a horse-collar, she asked: “Mr. 'Lonzo, what's a ‘Will’?”

“Er what?” said he, pausing in his work.

“In-the-name-of-God-amen-my-will!” quoted May, wide-eyed and curious.

'Lonzo chuckled and gurgled and then answered: “Lay not up treasures on earth, May, or you'll shorely get inter a scrape.”

“You didn't say that right,” reproachfully remarked May. “What is a ‘will,’ please, Mr. 'Lonzo?”

“That's what I like 'bout you, May, you've got a bulldog grip that's not to be choked off—even by scripter. A ‘will’ 's a paper calculated to raise h—ructions among all the friends, kith and kin of the man that makes it. In a ‘will’ a man tells what he

wants to give to certain people, whose names he mentions, an' generally the said people call him cussed for his pains. Say, May, I reckon if I war you, I wouldn't make 'wills' a subject of general conversation here—not till yer mother gets back, anyway. I'd plumb like ter know what started yer on that idea."

"Oh," answered May, evasively, "grown-ups know so many things—I—I just thought I'd ask, that's all."

"Huh-uh!" assented 'Lonzo, biting off the coarse thread he worked with. "Sometimes," he added, "I'm glad an' sometimes I'm sorry yer such a little girl."

"Why?" briefly and suspiciously questioned May.

"Because," with a heavy sigh, "if you wer' bigger an' took a notion ter marry me—nuthin' could save me—I should be 'Lonzo Marsh sure as fate!"

May flushed angrily: "You needn't be so afraid, scare-cat!—I'm not going to get married—not ever!"

"What, not to Hulda's Brat?" surprisedly questioned her tormentor, and fairly sputtering with indignation, she answered:

"There's no such person as 'Hulda's Brat,' and my dear Mr. Dred's going to marry some one else already grown up, and—and angel-pretty, there!"

"Then I'd like ter know what he's sparkin' you for, all the time?"

"He isn't! he isn't! you should take shame to your-

self! I'm jus' his te—I—I mean," stumbled the badgered child, "he just teaches me things!"

"What things?" grinned 'Lonzo, delighted to have gotten a rise out of his usually amiable victim.

"Oh, all kinds of things."

"As which, for instance?"

"About sky-signs for weather, and about watching wild things, squirrels or, or if it's a bird on a nest, how I must keep my arms behind me, 'cause wild things are most afraid of your arms, and,—why, I saw a little snake yesterday, sunning himself, and I never screamed one scream—nor threw a stone, nor anything, but just went around him and let him stay and get warm."

"Why?"

"'Cause my Mr. Dred says: 'It's bad enough to have to wriggle on your belly always without everybody hating you besides?' And—he telled me which are poison snakes, and this wasn't one."

"Oh, well, you're a queer pair. Here's the needle—and don't lose it, or the Hittites and the Spankites will be upon you, led by the aunt who loves you so. Say, May, will yer stop bein' mad, if I take you and yer doll as far as the covered bridge an' leave yer there while I go on to Marceline an' see the cooper for yer uncle?"

"Oh, Mr. 'Lonzo!" cried the child in pleased sur-

prise. "You *are* good—but my Aunt Catharine, will she let me?"

"You just happen to have yer doll or yer knittin', or whatever yer want, handy, an' I'll do the takin' yer. She won't get her back up at me—farm-hands are too goll durn'd hard ter get, an' too many people 'round here are ready ter give me more wages an' better quarters—so me an' the fiddle feel independent, an' we jus' stay 'cause we sorter like old Jason."

Oh, what that day meant to the child of few pleasures! Oh, that wonderful covered bridge! All the loneliness of Robinson Crusoe—all the mystery of the Arabian Nights—all the terror of Bluebeard's Chamber were found within that trembling old structure!

When 'Lonzo had dropped May down at its mouth and he and the horses had disappeared at its far end in a dazzling burst of sunlight, fear would probably have utterly overcome her had not a joyous bark reached her ears, which sound was followed by the sight of that old buccaneer, Watch, tearing toward her from around a bend of the road; red eyes, lolling tongue, and the broken rope dangling from his collar, all speaking eloquently of escape and loving pursuit; and the small girl, pressing kisses of affectionate gratitude upon his battle-scarred, smudgy old head, felt she was safe, and so gave herself up to the wildest imaginings.

Outside there was such a riot of color. Turquoise,

sapphire-blues, tourmaline, peridot and emerald-greens, earth-ochers, stone-grays, pearl-whites of clouds, and dull purple shadowed places all illuminated with the glory of the coarse wild flowers of August, and sunlight pouring, penetrating—overpowering sunlight over all. Inside it was first dim—then dusky—then dark, not the utter darkness of a bridge in good repair, for shingles were missing or cracked, or up-curved, and here and there a board had fallen from the siding, and through every rent and crack or crevice, the super-abundant blazing sunlight poured itself; in flecks and specks and spots upon the dust.

For May it turned at once to money—the gold of No-man's Land! In one place, long and wide, it broadened out into a pool, where all the weeny people of the woods could come and dip and float in dusky privacy, away from bulging bunny eyes and watchful birds and impudent young chipmunks! But, loveliest of all, one slender golden beam, piercing the very apex of the roof, slanted down to the footpath, where she sat, and all its golden length was full of dancing motes. She wondered, if she fell asleep right there, if she could see Jacob's Angels—this would be such a lovely ladder for them. But May's mind ran more to fairy folk, and the fantastic people of her own imagining—who lived in trees and clouds and streams—though she had never heard of nymph or dryad or of faun.

The side timbers of the bridge jutted out slantwise,

forming rows of shallow, stall-like compartments, delightful for housekeeping; but as May's doll, Alice Maud, was in very fragile health that day, she had to search long to find a compartment absolutely weather proof, away at the far end. Here she settled herself and, sitting on the string-piece, had just sung Alice Maud to sleep, when Watch, lying in the dust at her feet, growled. He did not lift his head, but the bristles on his back rose stiffly. May neither saw nor heard anything, but suddenly she stiffened with terror.

"Grandam Gallaway told me she thought that dogs can see hants, and—and, oh, the poor woman they found all dead here by the bridge once when that little dabbly creek was swelled all wild and full!"

The dog's lip drew back nervously: "Oh, don't, Watch, please!" whispered May. "Be quiet, you *can't* hurt her if she's a ghost, and—and" (very politely) "I'm sure she don't want to hurt us. Anyway—" (trembling violently as she rose), "we'll go out if the ghost-lady would rather stay here by herself."

Just then May saw that Watch's eyes were not only open, but staring upward. She glanced in the same direction—up there on the heavy timbers something seemed to move: "Watch!" gasped May, and then—"Oh, mercy!"

Two green, round eyes glowed down at her. She gave a shriek—Watch made a bound at the nearest

side timber! A long yowl and a spitting and a black No. 4-size cat, with a No. 12-size tail leaped to the next timber, with Watch in mad pursuit below!

The only thing that lived habitually in the bridge was a lusty echo, and now it flung back again and yet again the howls and snarls and savage barks of Watch, whose worst instincts were aroused and whose language was unspeakable, while each yowl and hiss of the murderously pursued cat was multiplied by heaven knows what numeral! And into this purgatorial place of horrid sounds entered a horse, carrying a dozing man, Bill Carew.

In a moment the horse broke into a gallop! Carew aroused to terror, clung to the creature's neck, and, as they emerged from the demoniac bridge, he waved his arm frantically to May—standing outside—crying: "Run! run, girl! Hell's broke loose in the bridge! I take my warnin' an' am goin' ter get religi'n an' swar off."

That was why when 'Lonzo came for her, he found May sitting on the stones under the bridge—with her feet dabbling in the water.

CHAPTER XV

Out of the Past

To Selina Marsh her period of service at the Brooks place was as a gourd of water to a traveler's sore thirst. Mr. Brooks was of New England parentage and up-bringing and fairly well-to-do. He was a practical farmer who saw no necessity for starving his mentality and therefore took in a story-paper for his wife and a weekly political sheet for himself, to say nothing of a monthly publication.

The house was the wax-neat abode of the Down-East housekeeper, who keeps her closets, in the fear of sudden death, so immaculate that spying mourners may find no condemning word to cast into her grave, of dust, of cobweb or of moth.

The sunny, airy, well-furnished kitchen was a sort of culinary Paradise compared to the tiny, dark, make-something-else-do cubby-hole at Gallaway's home; and Selina spent the greater part of her life there beating things—egg-white to stiff standing, butter to a froth, butter and sugar to a cream; and in turning out jellies and floating-islands and custards baked and custards boiled and flummery, and jumbles and cookies and jelly-roll and fried-cake and pound,

silver and gold cake, and clear-strained light soups for Mrs. Brooks and heavy rich meaty soups for Mr. Brooks.

She was both light of foot and hand, though strong to lift and turn the sick woman, and oh, wonder of wonders! she could read aloud in the night when the nervous attacks came suddenly on, and the sick one wanted to scream. One night she moaned and bit her nails and cried again and again: "Mrs. Marsh, I must! I must, I tell you! I've got to scream—I've got to! My throat is just bursting with great screeches!"

Then Selina, after looking at her twitching face a moment, said: "All right, Mrs. Brooks, just wait one moment, till I run in and warn Mr. Brooks, so he won't misunderstand and be frightened; and then you go ahead and scream your screaming fit off. I'll open this window, just so the sound won't make your own head worse," and out she ran, returning a moment later to cry gaily: "Now, Mrs. Brooks, let go and yell the torment out of your nerves!"

But Mrs. Brooks, seeing her husband in the hall with his hands already over his ears, broke into sudden, hearty laughter: "Good Lord!" she cried, "I couldn't scream now if you paid me a thousand a screech! Do go back to bed, Pa! Mrs. Marsh, if you'll give me just a chapter out of the 'Scottish Chiefs,' I believe I'll go right off to sleep." And that triumph over Mrs. Brooks' nerves established Selina at once in the high-

est estimation of her employers, and they treated her as a member of the family.

One day Mrs. Brooks asked Selina to ride her old gray pony over to Lima and try to match her knitting-needles, "Pa having broken one cleaning a pipe with it"—an aggravated case this of "I told you so!"—and returning with the new needles, Selina saw a horse and buggy emerge from the big white gate, and slowly turn in the opposite direction. There was something in the outline of the broad shoulders, in the jaunty angle of the hat, in the lustrous thickness of the dark hair that made her blood run chill in her veins. As she clung to the high, old-fashioned pommel of the saddle she saw with terror that he drew in his horse and rising slightly, looked back, and then on either side of him—as though he felt some alien presence.

"Good God!" she breathed, "I must be going mad, if I can see *him* in every passing stranger! But his shoulders were always a bit too high, and this man's had just that look of being slightly lifted! I wonder who he is?"

She sent the pony forward and as she rode up to the block by the side door, Mr. Brooks met her, holding out empty hands, jestingly saying: "You're just too late, my good woman! I've got no money for a deal—I've given it, every dollar I had, to Mr. Masker, for new-fangled machines that my grand-daddies did better without than I shall with!"

Selina, laughingly accepting the character of pedler he thrust upon her, asked: "If the good lady of the house would not like to buy some needles?" while her thoughts flew wildly to May, little May, whom she had thought so very safe.

Mrs. Brooks had long wished to visit a friend over at Ursa—but she could never heretofore bring herself to trust her house to any hired woman's care. Now, things were different and one morning Mr. Brooks astonished Selina by announcing that he was taking his wife away for the day and night and part of the second day, and that she, Selina, might not be frightened there alone he had gone over to Stanway's where Hulda's Brat had John Parsell doing some hauling, and had arranged for Parsell to come over to Brooks' house and stay all night to keep his sister company and protect her.

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"John! dear John! don't be so good to me—dear, foolish lad! Two little ones and a wife already taxing your strength to the utmost, and you eager to add more helpless ones to your burden! What loving folly you are talking, dear! But I thank you—from my soul, I do!"

Slow tears rose in the man's disappointed eyes: "I wanted Mother long ago, but Kate said she needed comforts I couldn't provide." He hung his head as if shamed by the recollection. "And yet sometimes I see such a look in Mother's eye, and sometimes Kate"—He paused, then burst out with: "For God's sake, Selina, tell me the truth, does Kate treat Mother kindly—does she provide her with comforts that are so very far beyond my means?"

"Kate Gallaway treats our mother as she might some aged pauper servant! Of comforts she has none! Young Dred Hollister secretly brings her medicine—think of that! By slow degrees she is dying a double death—one by the torture cancer, the second and worst by the anguish of an unwelcome presence, a begrudged hospitality!"

"Good God!" groaned the man, "What is to be done—and what does it all mean! Kate ill-treats Mother and yet she would hold her by force, if I went there for her to-morrow. Think of her denying that sufferin' woman ordinary comforts at the very time she is paying for a third farm!"

"What?" gasped Selina. "Buying another farm? Why, there has not been a week since I came here that she has not groaned over their penniless condition. She spoke of making payments as if the place was not yet paid for. She feared the fruit crop would not amount to much—that the buckwheat would not pay for its hauling to the city, and declared it was almost impossible to obtain any ready money; and there Mother would sit with her eyes bent upon her own frayed and patched old lap, silent as the grave, yet outside I saw Jason leading up and down that splendid young stallion—which meant money; and the two orchards stretching out with propped-up limbs over-weighted with fair and perfect fruit—they certainly

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"No, I got it from Hulda's Brat, he said his grandfather——"

"John Parsell, you ought to be ashamed to call that boy such a name as that!"

"Wal, that's so," contritely answered her brother, "for he's white clear through, is that young fellow."

"But that's only half your wrong-doing; think of the slur you cast upon Mrs. Hollister, when you speak of Hulda's Brat!"

"I'm doggon'd sorry, Selina, for she's as good a woman as ever lived. It war that old scalawag, her father, that nailed the name to the boy, but I won't miscall him again, see if I do. Wal, he said that Old Man Toler had got power 'torney to act for Ben Toler in the sellin' of his farm in the 'bottom lands' down here. The arth's like a gold mine for richness but the *ague* shook the life outen' three of his family an' he's off now ter get back his own health; and the Brat—er, I mean Dred Hollister says his grandfather's put to it ter know why Gallaway wants the thing all brought to a head and finished by the end of this week sure. He'd like ter know the mighty particular hurry for it all."

Suddenly Selina seemed to hear again the words overheard in the barn: "The Brookses can't tell what they dunno, an' then we can settle up about"—and

wondered if about the buying of that farm might not have been the closing words of the incomplete sentence.

"John, I cannot understand how Jason and Kate have so much more property than the rest of you."

"I dunno," slowly answered John. "They work awful hard, yer know."

"Well, so does every one else work hard, but see how poor Nash is. Wash is the smartest of the family and he just keeps his head above water, and you are dreadfully poor. How did they get all this—was Jason started out by his father?"

"Lord, no!—at least it war nothin' ter speak of. Old Azariah Gallaway held a quarter-section of land an' he had eleven people ter feed an' care for. He did give Jason a bit of wild land, an' he'd saved a little money by clearin' land for others—but that war all, except what Kate had—I guess that must have been sixty or seventy dollars."

"That must have come from Grandfather then, for poor Mother had nothing?"

"Y-a-a-s," answered John, dreamily, "it's all so queer, Selina. The Mormons war right furious when Grandfather broke away from 'em. They used ter go on 'bout losing another of the'r richest men. Yes, I heerd use the term offen, 'richest men,' an' yet when he died——" the voice trailed into silence.

"Why did he break with them, after all the sacrifices he made to become a Mormon?"

“He was awful unhappy, Selina, after Grandmother died—he seemed ter realize that it had broken her heart, tearing her away from her home ter take her into the wilderness, and—and she had never really believed in Mormonism. Still he clung ter the new faith, though it was hard for him ter ignore the open grossness and carnality of Joseph Smith’s life down here. Even after polygamy had been proclaimed by reason of a direct revelation from God, he might have believed thar was some Bible authority for such a thing hadn’t the reckless Prophet gone so far as ter write in his ‘Patriarchal Order of Matrimony or Plurality of Wives’—‘If a man marry a wife or make a covenant with her for time and for eternity—if that covenant is not by *me*, then it is not valid, because they are not joined by *me*.’ Just think what that implied, Selina. Grandmother was in her grave—but Grandfather resented that declaration as angrily as did other elderly men who, looking at the women who had toiled through long years, bearing and rearing their children for them, only ter become nameless creatures an’ no wives by this infamous revelation, furiously broke their vows and withdrew from the sect. Grandfather always said the Mormon leaders were the bitterest enemies of the Mormon people, which as a body war most sincere and simple souls. After that, though, he got old and fanciful. He wouldn’t buy a farm—he wouldn’t build. He took

ter wanderin' about the country, livin' in his big covered wagon. He used ter take me with him sometimes, an' he would talk an' talk of dead Grandma an' of her roses an' her favorite apple, the 'Harvest Queen,' and how fond she war of you; an' he'd scold me 'cause I didn't learn ter read, when Mother war teachin' Kate. I told him I war so sleepy when I come in from droppin' corn or whatever I could do ter help. Then Kate married Jason an' she tried an' tried ter get Grandfather ter live with her—but he wouldn't be persuaded. If he wanted help or company he sent for his Sally, as he called Mother. Then he got hurted and Kate had him brought ter her house, an'—an'—then Jason sent me on that fool-trip, with some men ter see if theirs war a good place ter settle in—right down in the muckiest marsh of a place where frogs would have chilled; and when I com' back Grandfather was dead and buried, an'—an', Selina'' (his voice quavered piteously), "Jay Gallaway told me that the old man had kinder turned ag'in me at the last, an'—an'—of the little he owned, he had left me nothin'. I felt bad, Selina, 'cause we had allers been such friends—Mother can tell yer. But Jay was mighty fair with me. He said the old man had been some expense, an' of course I'd allow ter Kate for that, an' they'd divide what war left between Kate an' me. So they gave me fifty dollars of their free will. They offer'd ter show me ther will, but, as I

couldn't read it, what war the use? But, lookin' back now, I can see that from that very time Kate began ter change. She wouldn't let me see Mother, an' she seemed allers to be tryin' to put me up ter goin' further West. Next year they got a lot of open land an' set out a hundred an' fifty fruit trees, an'——"

"Why, John, that must have cost a good deal?"

John looked up vaguely at her, then pleasantly remarked: "Oh, wal, they war very young trees, yer know."

"Yes, but they must have cost thirty cents or so apiece, and transporting them cost something. They probably cost sixty dollars or more; and the land already opened cost more than uncleared woodland."

"Y-a-a-s," slowly answered John, with bewildered eyes, "it *is* queer."

"Why does every one hate Sister Kate so badly, John?"

"So you know that, do you—little as you've been about?" asked the man, ruefully. "People took it hard that yer didn't even com' to a Sunday tea-drinkin' or accept any of ther invites offered yer as a stranger visitin' a neighbor. Oh, I told 'em, Selina, I knew you'd never heerd of a word of their friendly offers. I hated ter say anything ag'in my own kith and kin, but I couldn't have you blamed unfairly, so I jest up an' told 'em, Kate was keepin' yer away from their houses for spite, 'cause they hadn't invited *her* for so

long ter any quiltin', apple-parin', huskin'-bee, or any kind 'er frolic. My wife, Rose, said when you came, an' everybody wanted ter say 'how-dy' an' give yer a friendly hand instead of ther go-by, 'Now's Catharine Gallaway's chance'' she says, 'ter git back inter good standin' ag'in. Every one will forgit old scores an' be plumb neighborly for ther sake of ther stranger sister com' from land's-ends ter visit her an' Mother Parsell,' an' she war right. It war a clear case, Selina, of 'we-uns will be plumb good ter you-uns, if you-uns will keep yer claws outen the eyes of we-uns.'''

He laughed rather drearily and went on: "Selina, do yer remember how them Bible pigs behaved—eh? swine? yes, that do sound more Bibley—ther swine when the devils entered them jest went rippin' an' tearin', mad-like down ther steep mountain places, an' inter the stranglin' waves. Kate makes me sometimes think that devils have entered inter her, an' are drivin' her ter self-destruction. Yet she used ter be called pretty Kate Parsell, an' 'the Partridge,' 'cause she war so round an' plump. An' when Jason war courtin' her it war thought a fine joke ter say 'that young Gallaway war never tired of huntin' partridge.' First thing after she began ter git along was that she seemed ter run mad about money. She did things that war plumb ornery, low-down things. She got so she would not give a hand's turn ter help no one along—an' Jason, though kind'er shame-faced an' unwillin',

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silver and gold cake, and clear-strained light soups for Mrs. Brooks and heavy rich meaty soups for Mr. Brooks.

She was both light of foot and hand, though strong to lift and turn the sick woman, and oh, wonder of wonders! she could read aloud in the night when the nervous attacks came suddenly on, and the sick one wanted to scream. One night she moaned and bit her nails and cried again and again: "Mrs. Marsh, I must! I must, I tell you! I've got to scream—I've got to! My throat is just bursting with great screeches!"

Then Selina, after looking at her twitching face a moment, said: "All right, Mrs. Brooks, just wait one moment, till I run in and warn Mr. Brooks, so he won't misunderstand and be frightened; and then you go ahead and scream your screaming fit off. I'll open this window, just so the sound won't make your own head worse," and out she ran, returning a moment later to cry gaily: "Now, Mrs. Brooks, let go and yell the torment out of your nerves!"

But Mrs. Brooks, seeing her husband in the hall with his hands already over his ears, broke into sudden, hearty laughter: "Good Lord!" she cried, "I couldn't scream now if you paid me a thousand a screech! Do go back to bed, Pa! Mrs. Marsh, if you'll give me just a chapter out of the 'Scottish Chiefs,' I believe I'll go right off to sleep." And that triumph over Mrs. Brooks' nerves established Selina at once in the high-

est estimation of her employers, and they treated her as a member of the family.

One day Mrs. Brooks asked Selina to ride her old gray pony over to Lima and try to match her knitting-needles, "Pa having broken one cleaning a pipe with it"—an aggravated case this of "I told you so!"—and returning with the new needles, Selina saw a horse and buggy emerge from the big white gate, and slowly turn in the opposite direction. There was something in the outline of the broad shoulders, in the jaunty angle of the hat, in the lustrous thickness of the dark hair that made her blood run chill in her veins. As she clung to the high, old-fashioned pommel of the saddle she saw with terror that he drew in his horse and rising slightly, looked back, and then on either side of him—as though he felt some alien presence.

"Good God!" she breathed, "I must be going mad, if I can see *him* in every passing stranger! But his shoulders were always a bit too high, and this man's had just that look of being slightly lifted! I wonder who he is?"

She sent the pony forward and as she rode up to the block by the side door, Mr. Brooks met her, holding out empty hands, jestingly saying: "You're just too late, my good woman! I've got no money for a deal—I've given it, every dollar I had, to Mr. Masker, for new-fangled machines that my grand-daddies did better without than I shall with!"

Selina, laughingly accepting the character of pedler he thrust upon her, asked: "If the good lady of the house would not like to buy some needles?" while her thoughts flew wildly to May, little May, whom she had thought so very safe.

Mrs. Brooks had long wished to visit a friend over at Ursa—but she could never heretofore bring herself to trust her house to any hired woman's care. Now, things were different and one morning Mr. Brooks astonished Selina by announcing that he was taking his wife away for the day and night and part of the second day, and that she, Selina, might not be frightened there alone he had gone over to Stanway's where Hulda's Brat had John Parsell doing some hauling, and had arranged for Parsell to come over to Brooks' house and stay all night to keep his sister company and protect her.

Such consideration was a novelty to Selina and it touched her deeply; but far beyond the gratitude was the joy of a real undisturbed visit with her brother, such a one as she had never yet been permitted even with her aged mother.

And that night in the peace and quiet of the brightly lighted sitting-room, each told the story of the years agone, and John Parsell sat, elbows on knees and face hidden in his hands, and heard how his innocent small niece stood nameless in the world; heard of the brazen effrontery of that false marriage in the Canadian

church; of the betrayed first wife's attack. Listening quietly up to the hunting down of the piteous pair and the malignant determination of Charles Paul Lavallo to possess his little milk-white maid by force. That brought his head up with a jerk and there was a grayish whiteness about his mouth as he said grimly: "That man should be shot down on sight like a mad dog! Poor sister! is it for him you carry the weapon I once saw?"

"No, John, not, at least, with any idea of revengefully attacking him and thus leaving my little May alone in the world! But I carry it for her defense, alone, when we are traveling."

"What have you done with it?" asked the brother.

"I have it upstairs in my bag. The lock is broken on my trunk, and there are four children all told at Kate's house, and you can guess how much personal property is respected there. Better carry it along, I thought, than have small fingers blown off through accident."

The dense blue eyes looked at her pathetically. He took her work-hardened hand and smoothed it gently: "Little Selina," he murmured, "we were always such friends. Do you remember how we toiled to get the two birds back in the nest they had fallen from? And how you made a small calico bag to tie on the puppy's stump when a farmer had shortened his tail? Such a kind-hearted little soul, you were, and how you

idolized baby Kate! Now, it's you, with your warm heart who are shamed and homeless and she—. Selina, I am so poor—so, oh, so damnably poor! and beside you I am awkward and ignorant, but there's two beds in my cabin; two shaker-rockers and enough coarse food to keep want from the door, where my wife, a swarthy black-eyed Gallaway, as gentle as she is unlearned and as neat as a pin, will give you the plumb hearty welcome of a sister. Selina, it's a mighty poor home to offer you, but you'll find love and respect and protection there; and should that pestilence, Laval, ever appear, you'll have a brother ready to fire that shot for you! Selina, will you come to us?"

"John! dear John! don't be so good to me—dear, foolish lad! Two little ones and a wife already taxing your strength to the utmost, and you eager to add more helpless ones to your burden! What loving folly you are talking, dear! But I thank you—from my soul, I do!"

Slow tears rose in the man's disappointed eyes: "I wanted Mother long ago, but Kate said she needed comforts I couldn't provide." He hung his head as if shamed by the recollection. "And yet sometimes I see such a look in Mother's eye, and sometimes Kate"—He paused, then burst out with: "For God's sake, Selina, tell me the truth, does Kate treat Mother kindly—does she provide her with comforts that are so very far beyond my means?"

"Kate Gallaway treats our mother as she might some aged pauper servant! Of comforts she has none! Young Dred Hollister secretly brings her medicine—think of that! By slow degrees she is dying a double death—one by the torture cancer, the second and worst by the anguish of an unwelcome presence, a begrudged hospitality!"

"Good God!" groaned the man, "What is to be done—and what does it all mean! Kate ill-treats Mother and yet she would hold her by force, if I went there for her to-morrow. Think of her denying that sufferin' woman ordinary comforts at the very time she is paying for a third farm!"

"What?" gasped Selina. "Buying another farm? Why, there has not been a week since I came here that she has not groaned over their penniless condition. She spoke of making payments as if the place was not yet paid for. She feared the fruit crop would not amount to much—that the buckwheat would not pay for its hauling to the city, and declared it was almost impossible to obtain any ready money; and there Mother would sit with her eyes bent upon her own frayed and patched old lap, silent as the grave, yet outside I saw Jason leading up and down that splendid young stallion—which meant money; and the two orchards stretching out with propped-up limbs over-weighted with fair and perfect fruit—they certainly

meant more money. Still, buying another farm must be some mistake of yours, John?"

"No, I got it from Hulda's Brat, he said his grandfather——"

"John Parsell, you ought to be ashamed to call that boy such a name as that!"

"Wal, that's so," contritely answered her brother, "for he's white clear through, is that young fellow."

"But that's only half your wrong-doing; think of the slur you cast upon Mrs. Hollister, when you speak of Hulda's Brat!"

"I'm doggon'd sorry, Selina, for she's as good a woman as ever lived. It war that old scalawag, her father, that nailed the name to the boy, but I won't miscall him again, see if I do. Wal, he said that Old Man Toler had got power 'torney to act for Ben Toler in the sellin' of his farm in the 'bottom lands' down here. The arth's like a gold mine for richness but the *ague* shook the life outen' three of his family an' he's off now ter get back his own health; and the Brat—er, I mean Dred Hollister says his grandfather's put to it ter know why Gallaway wants the thing all brought to a head and finished by the end of this week sure. He'd like ter know the mighty particular hurry for it all."

Suddenly Selina seemed to hear again the words overheard in the barn: "The Brookses can't tell what they dunno, an' then we can settle up about"—and

wondered if about the buying of that farm might not have been the closing words of the incomplete sentence.

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couldn't read it, what war the use? But, lookin' back now, I can see that from that very time Kate began ter change. She wouldn't let me see Mother, an' she seemed allers to be tryin' to put me up ter goin' further West. Next year they got a lot of open land an' set out a hundred an' fifty fruit trees, an'——"

"Why, John, that must have cost a good deal?"

John looked up vaguely at her, then pleasantly remarked: "Oh, wal, they war very young trees, yer know."

"Yes, but they must have cost thirty cents or so apiece, and transporting them cost something. They probably cost sixty dollars or more; and the land already opened cost more than uncleared woodland."

"Y-a-a-s," slowly answered John, with bewildered eyes, "it *is* queer."

"Why does every one hate Sister Kate so badly, John?"

"So you know that, do you—little as you've been about?" asked the man, ruefully. "People took it hard that yer didn't even com' to a Sunday tea-drinkin' or accept any of ther invites offered yer as a stranger visitin' a neighbor. Oh, I told 'em, Selina, I knew you'd never heerd of a word of their friendly offers. I hated ter say anything ag'in my own kith and kin, but I couldn't have you blamed unfairly, so I jest up an' told 'em, Kate was keepin' yer away from their houses for spite, 'cause they hadn't invited *her* for so

long ter any quiltin', apple-parin', huskin'-bee, or any kind 'er frolic. My wife, Rose, said when you came, an' everybody wanted ter say 'how-dy' an' give yer a friendly hand instead of ther go-by, 'Now's Catharine Gallaway's chance' she says, 'ter git back inter good standin' ag'in. Every one will forgit old scores an' be plumb neighborly for ther sake of ther stranger sister com' from land's-ends ter visit her an' Mother Parsell,' an' she war right. It war a clear case, Selina, of 'we-uns will be plumb good ter you-uns, if you-uns will keep yer claws outen the eyes of we-uns.'"

He laughed rather drearily and went on: "Selina, do yer remember how them Bible pigs behaved—eh? swine? yes, that do sound more Bibley—ther swine when the devils entered them jest went rippin' an' tearin', mad-like down ther steep mountain places, an' inter the stranglin' waves. Kate makes me sometimes think that devils have entered inter her, an' are drivin' her ter self-destruction. Yet she used ter be called pretty Kate Parsell, an' 'the Partridge,' 'cause she war so round an' plump. An' when Jason war courtin' her it war thought a fine joke ter say 'that young Gallaway war never tired of huntin' partridge.' First thing after she began ter git along was that she seemed ter run mad about money. She did things that war plumb ornery, low-down things. She got so she would not give a hand's turn ter help no one along—an' Jason, though kind'er shame-faced an' unwillin',

war so far under her thumb, he darsen't stand her out, but jest knuckled down and minded her say. Then she got an edge on both sides of her tongue. She hadn't a decent word for airy livin' creatur', an' seemed like she enjoyed hurtin' people.

"I allers want'er keep out'er the way of a woman that little children are afraid of. Why, you know, Selina, the savagest dog that was ever chained, won't touch ther lumberin' young pup that blunders inter his very kennel or noses over his food. Yit little children as well as dogs fear Kate's pale eyes, an' they git outen her path as quickly as unsteady little feet can carry 'em.

"It took ther mildest woman in ther whole community, an' she's my wife, Rose Parsell, ter strike back for once and plant the blow whar it would rankle for many a day. Rose had been compelled ter git the baby some flannels at ther village, wher' they had jest one single roll of flannel in the store and that was yaller. I remember how put out she war 'bout the color all ther time she war sewin' of it inter petticoats. Wal, Kate comes drivin' by ther cabin one day, an' I goes out ter say how-dy, an' she sees a little yaller petticoat hangin' on a bush, an' she sneers an' says, 'How mongrel!'

"'What yer mean?' I ask.

"'Oh, ther's yer half-breed gypsy mother-in-law's taste—filterin' down ter *your* get!'

“Rose, who war on her knees, weedin’, gets up and says slowly: ‘You war mighty glad ter have that same half-breed gypsy’s son marry yer on time, Catharine Parsell! Her taste in colors warn’t troublin’ yer while yer war waitin’ for the protection of her name. If my children are mongrel, what be yours?’ an’ down she dropped to her weedin’ ag’in, but I knew she war cryin’ for she’s fond of her mother, an’ with good reason.

“Wal, Kate went white as death. She offen throws hersel inter fits in her rages an’ the doctor comes an’ bleeds her, and some one sits up with her—but ’Lonzo says she allers knows every single word said while she’s supposed ter be unconscious. That day I certainly thought she war goin’ ter stiffen out in a fit, an’ she started in an’ rolled up her eyes—then suddenly she changed her mind an’ she said she’d take that outen my wife if she had ter wait a hundred years! For, yer see, Rose had known where ter strike—an’ Kate never forgives.

“Then bad luck seemed ter settle right down onter Old Man Azariah Gallaway. Every kind’er loss and mishap came upon him; so at last he had ter borry some money. He was goin’ ter the city ter see what he could do, when Jason offers ter let him have it—tellin’ him he could well as not. Azariah, thinkin’ ter save talk, an’ keep things’er bit more ter himsel’, accepted the offer. Wal, he worked hard enuff ter

kill a mule, and Grandam didn't 'low hersel' enuff ter eat, in their efforts ter pay off that debt. When he came slowly up the road one night an' held out to Jason ther interest on the loan, Jay said, 'No, Father, we'll call that a payment on the debt itsel'—I don't want no interest from my father, I guess!' an' I put in, 'That's right, Jay!' An' at that, good Lord! Selina, I war never so shamed in all my life, as I war then by my own sister. She war beside hersel' with rage, an'—oh, well, Old Man Gallaway left the *interest*—I went for ther doctor, an' poor Mother sat up all night.

"Jest as I was goin' ter leave the house, 'Lonzo, out'en the porch, said angrily ter Jay, 'If that's real, she ought ter have a strait-jacket on her—if it's not real, she ought'er have a pail of cold water on her!' an', Selina, her eyes flew open in spite of her, an', though she closed 'em quick, I saw she war conscious as I was. She jest keeps them 'tacks as 'er rod in pickle for Jason if he opposes her.

"Then when part of ther debt had been work'd off, the old man suddenly fell right in his tracks. He jest breathed through ther night an' in ther mornin' he said faintly, 'Rebekah,' and Mother Gallaway bent down and smiled inter his eyes, an' he looked an' looked, an' he kind'er smiled back, and she kissed him an'—he was dead—with her lips on his.

"Then, Selina! oh, Selina! ther name of Parsell was

dragged in ther mud! Its sound war like ther cracklin' of thorns in the fire! How can I tell yer what she, ther woman who was once my lov'd sister, did! She demanded of ther stricken old woman, kneelin' by her dead, ther money still due on the debt!

"Dazed, the widder said: 'She had nothin' now, but would, of course, pay in time.'

"But Kate insisted on immediate payment, an' in leavin' the house warned her: 'I've got ter have that money before this body goes ter burial! I'll send Jason for it in ther mornin'!'"

"Good God!" gasped Selina Marsh, her face flushing crimson. "Good God!——"

"Wait," groaned John, bowing his head in utter shame. "Ther hearse was ordered from the gate; the gathered friends an' neighbors war dismissed—the dead man's bearers war waved back from the door—Catharine Gallaway promptin' the sullen, shame-faced Jason when he faltered, in claiming that by power of ther law they withheld their debtor's body from its burial until all just claims war settled."

Appalled, Selina thought she saw it all! the people silently stealing away, while all unhoused and forlorn the dead old man lay helpless, beneath the insult cast upon him by his son! Then beyond the brutal ignoring of all tenderness of sentiment, of all reverence, there began to loom certain practical features of the

disgraceful situation her sister had created and Selina shuddered as she recalled the inefficiency and ignorance of the rustic undertaker, who had not even ice with which to delay the swift chemical changes that might make the dead a menace to the living.

Springing to her feet, she cried: "She is a monster, John!" Then pressing her brow between both hands she went on brokenly: "But—I—but where? Why, surely there can be no such law in existence—certainly not in the States, as that of holding a dead body for debt? Why, we haven't even debtors' prisons, have we? Oh, dear! women never know about such things! But were there not some men present who knew enough of the law of the land to prevent such an incredible outrage?"

"Wal, yer see," said the shame-bowed Parsell, "the only one who knew an' who would have shown authority was not there that first day, he, Mr. Stanway, was in Quincy. Ther rest war at best plain, unlarn'd farmers, with slow-movin' minds, an' they war so plumb dumfounded they jest obeyed orders like so many scared children. Poor Grandam Gallaway, who's proud as Lucifer an' never in her life did an ornery thing, an' had never before owed a dollar, felt this thing branded her as an intended cheat, an' but for Nash's quickness in gettin' the gun outen her hands ther' would have been murder done.

"As ther people drov' off, they gradu'lly got back

their senses, an' some of the men talked things over an' they raised twelve or fifteen dollars among 'em, poor souls, which one man brought back ter Grandam Gallaway ter help make up th' amount.

"She war out in the gray dawn ridin' without any saddle but a folded blanket an' huntin' for the money that would buy the priv'lege of Christian burial for her dead man. An' so she met Mr. Stanway, an' he asked th' amount due, an' she told him what war claimed, though she said, 'I shorely thought Azariah had made 'er payment they don't allow.'

"An' he said: 'Call yer friends for the funeral ter-day, late. I'll settle with yer son, an' I have sent beyond Ursa for a minister ter conduct a real service of scripeter, hymn an' prayer at your house, an' ter go to the grave, too, for a final blessin' on a good man gone ter rest.' Before he could move even, the old woman had slid from ther horse an' was on her knees in ther dust, clingin' ter his hands, an' her shakin' old mouth workin', an' not a sound comin' outen it. An' he lifted her up an' put her back, an' gave the reins inter her hands, an' then she said, 'I'll pay yer every dollar back an' each jerk of ther loom, each hack of ther hoe, an' each blow of ther axe that helps ter earn, sir, ther money, will be sweeter'n honey ter me. Yes, I'll pay back that, Mr. Stanway, but for the other, for ther real preacher, buryin' of my man, you'll have ter wait for Almighty God ter pay yer that.'

"So again ther people gathered an' they waited for ther minister, who had far ter come, an' jest as ther buggy came down ther road, Catharine Gallaway, foller'd by Jason, his head hangin'—appeared at ther door. She stepped inside an' said out loud, 'Grandam Gallaway, neether you nor Nash has settled for that debt yit, an' I tell yer this funeral can't move till—' 'Will you have ther decency ter step outside?' said a man's voice, an' Kate nearly fell, when Old Bob Stanway faced her.

"'I—I—why—oh!' she stammered. 'There's'er small matter of business, Mr. Stanway, that——'

"'Step outside, please,' sternly insisted old Bob, an' down she stepped. Then Mr. Stanway thrust 'er roll of money toward her. 'Thar,' said he, 'is ther sum you claim as due yer. I hope yer not makin' a mistake as ter the last payment yer received from yer father-in-law—an' let me tell you that American courts don't look with favor upon your peculiar method of collectin' debts, through intimerdation.'

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"'Under a law that never existed, save in yer own inventive imagination. Come right in, Mr. Chapin,' he said to the minister, who had hitched his horse an' com' up ther path.

"'As they went in, Jason 'tempted ter foller, but, Selina, Mr. Stanway, after a glance at Mother Galla-

way, stopped him, and said, 'Your presence here would be an outrage.' But Jason argued, 'I'm a son of the dead man, I have'er right.'

"'It's a pity yer did not remember the relationship yesterday—you have forfeited the right to be present at this service. I speak for yer mother, so please to withdraw, we have need for haste.' An' that's how it happened that neither Jay nor Kate was at the funeral of old Azariah, an' that's why in the hull county there's not another woman so heartily disliked as is our sister Kate.

"She went home that day to find that some one had chalked up in big letters on the barn door—LIAR—EXTORTIONIST—TRICKSTER."

"Oh!" cried Selina, "I must go back to Cleveland! I'm no hypocrite and can never live beneath the same roof with that cold-hearted, cruel woman; and I've got to go back there on Saturday, for I'm not needed here any longer, Mrs. Brooks being quite over her attack of sickness."

"Oh, Selina!" groaned John, "must yer go? think of poor mother?"

"God knows, I do think of her, but what good am I to her here? We dare not even smile at each other! Why on earth is Kate so afraid to let us exchange a word? I tell you, sister not only hates but fears me—but I have done nothing to injure her. I have not cost her a penny of actual money, and I've tried to earn



"Well," asked Selina, "where did your laugh come in?"

"Whar? Why, 'Lonzo told me Masker boasts he never carried er gun in his hull life—What's the matter, Dear?—be yer nervous?—yer jump so. Wal, 'that was his money-roll—an' he carries it that a-way on purpose, makin' it pertect itse'f in er measure by lookin' like er perfect terror of er gun.' Smart, isn't it? He charged 'Lonzo not ter give it erway ter people—so I promised ter keep quiet about it, an' I have 'cept ter you. Say, Mr. Stanway's comin' home soon, next week I believe, an' I guess ther Br—'er Dred will be plumb glad of it. It's er pretty heavy load for such young shoulders, an' Stanway's been so much longer than he expected ter be. But he comes home richer than he went. Say, Selina, he's smart as they make 'em, is Old Bob, an' he's growin' right fond of that young Hollister—who 'll be twenty-one in a day or two; an' he thinks it cussed mean for Old Man Toler ter take every cent the boy earns—so what did he do, but go off ter Tennessee without settlin' up with Dred—jest sayin', casu'l like, 'Oh, my boy, you won't mind waitin' er bit for yer money, will yer? As yer can't spend it down here any way?' An' Dred, very red, says, 'Oh, no, sir—it makes no difference ter me.' An' Old Toler, rememb'rin' that ther twenty-first birthday will be along now soon, when his grip on the boy's earnin's 'll have ter loosen, comes up ter the place an' demands money of

war so far under her thumb, he darsen't stand her out, but jest knuckled down and minded her say. Then she got an edge on both sides of her tongue. She hadn't a decent word for airy livin' creatur', an' seemed like she enjoyed hurtin' people.

"I allers want'er keep out'er the way of a woman that little children are afraid of. Why, you know, Selina, the savagest dog that was ever chained, won't touch ther lumberin' young pup that blunders inter his very kennel or noses over his food. Yit little children as well as dogs fear Kate's pale eyes, an' they git outen her path as quickly as unsteady little feet can carry 'em.

"It took ther mildest woman in ther whole community, an' she's my wife, Rose Parsell, ter strike back for once and plant the blow whar it would rankle for many a day. Rose had been compelled ter git the baby some flannels at ther village, wher' they had jest one single roll of flannel in the store and that was yaller. I remember how put out she war 'bout the color all ther time she war sewin' of it inter petticoats. Wal, Kate comes drivin' by ther cabin one day, an' I goes out ter say how-dy, an' she sees a little yaller petticoat hangin' on a bush, an' she sneers an' says, 'How mongrel!'

"'What yer mean?' I ask.

"'Oh, ther's yer half-breed gypsy mother-in-law's taste—filterin' down ter *your* get!'"

"Rose, who war on her knees, weedin', gets up and says slowly: 'You war mighty glad ter have that same half-breed gypsy's son marry yer on time, Catharine Parsell! Her taste in colors warn't troublin' yer while yer war waitin' for the protection of her name. If my children are mongrel, what be yours?' an' down she dropped to her weedin' ag'in, but I knew she war cryin' for she's fond of her mother, an' with good reason.

"Wal, Kate went white as death. She offen throws hersel inter fits in her rages an' the doctor comes an' bleeds her, and some one sits up with her—but 'Lonzo says she allers knows every single word said while she's supposed ter be unconscious. That day I certainly thought she war goin' ter stiffen out in a fit, an' she started in an' rolled up her eyes—then suddenly she changed her mind an' she said she'd take that outen my wife if she had ter wait a hundred years! For, yer see, Rose had known where ter strike—an' Kate never forgives.

"Then bad luck seemed ter settle right down onter Old Man Azariah Gallaway. Every kind'er loss and mishap came upon him; so at last he had ter borry some money. He was goin' ter the city ter see what he could do, when Jason offers ter let him have it—tellin' him he could well as not. Azariah, thinkin' ter save talk, an' keep things'er bit more ter himsel', accepted the offer. Wal, he worked hard enuff ter

kill a mule, and Grandam didn't 'low hersel' enuff ter eat, in their efforts ter pay off that debt. When he came slowly up the road one night an' held out to Jason ther interest on the loan, Jay said, 'No, Father, we'll call that a payment on the debt itsel'—I don't want no interest from my father, I guess!' an' I put in, 'That's right, Jay!' An' at that, good Lord! Selina, I war never so shamed in all my life, as I war then by my own sister. She war beside hersel' with rage, an'—oh, well, Old Man Gallaway left the *interest*—I went for ther doctor, an' poor Mother sat up all night.

"Jest as I was goin' ter leave the house, 'Lonzo, out'en the porch, said angrily ter Jay, 'If that's real, she ought ter have a strait-jacket on her—if it's not real, she ought'er have a pail of cold water on her!' an', Selina, her eyes flew open in spite of her, an', though she closed 'em quick, I saw she war conscious as I was. She jest keeps them 'tacks as 'er rod in pickle for Jason if he opposes her.

"Then when part of ther debt had been work'd off, the old man suddenly fell right in his tracks. He jest breathed through ther night an' in ther mornin' he said faintly, 'Rebekah,' and Mother Gallaway bent down and smiled inter his eyes, an' he looked an' looked, an' he kind'er smiled back, and she kissed him an'—he was dead—with her lips on his.

"Then, Selina! oh, Selina! ther name of Parsell was

dragged in ther mud! Its sound war like ther cracklin' of thorns in the fire! How can I tell yer what she, ther woman who was once my lov'd sister, did! She demanded of ther stricken old woman, kneelin' by her dead, ther money still due on the debt!

"Dazed, the widder said: 'She had nothin' now, but would, of course, pay in time.'

"But Kate insisted on immediate payment, an' in leavin' the house warned her: 'I've got ter have that money before this body goes ter burial! I'll send Jason for it in ther mornin'!'"

"Good God!" gasped Selina Marsh, her face flushing crimson. "Good God!——"

"Wait," groaned John, bowing his head in utter shame. "Ther hearse was ordered from the gate; the gathered friends an' neighbors war dismissed—the dead man's bearers war waved back from the door—Catharine Gallaway promptin' the sullen, shame-faced Jason when he faltered, in claiming that by power of ther law they withheld their debtor's body from its burial until all just claims war settled."

Appalled, Selina thought she saw it all! the people silently stealing away, while all unhoused and forlorn the dead old man lay helpless, beneath the insult cast upon him by his son! Then beyond the brutal ignoring of all tenderness of sentiment, of all reverence, there began to loom certain practical features of the

disgraceful situation her sister had created and Selina shuddered as she recalled the inefficiency and ignorance of the rustic undertaker, who had not even ice with which to delay the swift chemical changes that might make the dead a menace to the living.

Springing to her feet, she cried: "She is a monster, John!" Then pressing her brow between both hands she went on brokenly: "But—I—but where? Why, surely there can be no such law in existence—certainly not in the States, as that of holding a dead body for debt? Why, we haven't even debtors' prisons, have we? Oh, dear! women never know about such things! But were there not some men present who knew enough of the law of the land to prevent such an incredible outrage?"

"Wal, yer see," said the shame-bowed Parsell, "the only one who knew an' who would have shown authority was not there that first day, he, Mr. Stanway, was in Quincy. Ther rest war at best plain, unlarn'd farmers, with slow-movin' minds, an' they war so plumb dumfounded they jest obeyed orders like so many scared children. Poor Grandam Gallaway, who's proud as Lucifer an' never in her life did an ornery thing, an' had never before owed a dollar, felt this thing branded her as an intended cheat, an' but for Nash's quickness in gettin' the gun outen her hands ther' would have been murder done.

"As ther people drov' off, they gradu'lly got back

their senses, an' some of the men talked things over an' they raised twelve or fifteen dollars among 'em, poor souls, which one man brought back ter Grandam Gallaway ter help make up th' amount.

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"God knows, I do think of her, but what good am I to her here? We dare not even smile at each other! Why on earth is Kate so afraid to let us exchange a word? I tell you, sister not only hates but fears me—but I have done nothing to injure her. I have not cost her a penny of actual money, and I've tried to earn

my keep. Ah, well, I'll take my little one and go back where there are schools for her to go to—that is, when I will have just a little more money. Why," she continued, laughingly, "does not your pretty Miss Stanway get married and so make necessary a lot of extra work and give me a chance to earn something?"

"Lord, Selina! she's the sweetest creetur, I mean in character, as well as looks, and do yer know if he only had some money—even what that old coot Toler has taken away from him, I'd like ter see that manly ripstaver of a worker, Dred Hollister, step up and marry her. Why, love is jest shinin' outen her eyes for him! Yet that tricky little witch'll make him mis'erable sometimes, jest for the fun of it, I s'pose.

"The men say that that agent Masker was fair outen his fool head over Amabel Stanway."

"What?" exclaimed Selina. "In love with that child?"

"That's what they say, an' bolder than brass over it too. I had a laugh ter myse'f over one of the fellers ter-day. He war tellin' the rest of 'em of ther awful big gun Masker packed—how he'd seen it, as he war stoopin' over lookin' at a troublesome reaper. Why, he says it bulged out from his hip pocket like 'er reg'lar cannon.' 'Wal,' another chimed in, 'he needs it, I s'pose, for he collects a good deal of money for his firm.' "

"Well," asked Selina, "where did your laugh come in?"

"Whar? Why, 'Lonzo told me Masker boasts he never carried er gun in his hull life—What's the matter, Dear?—be yer nervous?—yer jump so. Wal, 'that was his money-roll—an' he carries it that a-way on purpose, makin' it pertect itse'f in er measure by lookin' like er perfect terror of er gun.' Smart, isn't it? He charged 'Lonzo not ter give it erway ter people—so I promised ter keep quiet about it, an' I have 'cept ter you. Say, Mr. Stanway's comin' home soon, next week I believe, an' I guess ther Br—'er Dred will be plumb glad of it. It's er pretty heavy load for such young shoulders, an' Stanway's been so much longer than he expected ter be. But he comes home richer than he went. Say, Selina, he's smart as they make 'em, is Old Bob, an' he's growin' right fond of that young Hollister—who 'll be twenty-one in a day or two; an' he thinks it cussed mean for Old Man Toler ter take every cent the boy earns—so what did he do, but go off ter Tennessee without settlin' up with Dred—jest sayin', casu'l like, 'Oh, my boy, you won't mind waitin' er bit for yer money, will yer? As yer can't spend it down here any way?' An' Dred, very red, says, 'Oh, no, sir—it makes no difference ter me.' An' Old Toler, rememb'rin' that ther twenty-first birthday will be along now soon, when his grip on the boy's earnin's 'll have ter loosen, comes up ter the place an' demands money of

Dred—ter help pay his taxes. Taxes! the old skinflint paid 'em mor'n three weeks ago, ter my certain knowledge. Wal', Dred has no money, an' says so. First, Old Toler gives'm ther lie, then he begins to argufy, then when he's convinced he begins ter abuse Stanway, an' denounces his pretensions ter wealth, when he can't pay his help even; then he finds ther men have all been paid reg'lar, an' back he comes, an', Selina, if he didn't go ter Mrs. Stanway an' demand Dred's wages. She says 'She never had anything ter do with affairs,' then he tells her it's time ter begin, an' she's ter hand over the money her husband owes ter Dred. She smilin' an' contem'tuous says, 'She would not dare ter interfere with Mr. Stanway's business matters, nor touch his money.' He starts ter leave, then back he comes an' wants her ter advance ther money outen her own pocket, an' stop it outen the boy's future pay. Then she says, very politely, 'Mr. Stanway 'll be comin' home very soon now, in five or six days, an' you can settle with him in person.'

"'Six days!' roared Old Zachary, 'what in tunkate good'll that do, yer pig-headed, dum-gasted woman! The Brat's of age day arter to-morrow, an' arter that I may whistle for his doggon'd money!'

"'Yes,' smiled Mrs. Stanway, 'I think that was why my Robert didn't settle with young Mr. Hollister before he left, he wanted Dred ter hold his own hard-earned money, while you, Mr. Toler, whistled for it.'

"Ha! ha! Selina! I did honestly think ther miserly old fraud war goin' ter have a stroke of apoplexy, right then and thar! When he drov' off yer could hear him cussing for half er mile. Amabel looked up at him, an' said, 'Oh, Dred, how he did want ter thrash you again, as he used ter, but you could hold him with one hand now. What, I wonder, can I give you for yer birthday? No one can go ter the city till papa comes?'

"An' he got red and choked, an' then with er rush he said, 'Oh, please—can yer—will yer give me ther old brown "Wonder-Man,"' whatever on 'arth he meant by that. Why, Selina, what's the matter with *you now?*'"

She was clasping her hands and crying, happily: "He has succeeded, or he's on the way to success, or he'd never ask for that! Oh, the brave, determined, handsome boy! Dear, a moment ago I was sorry I ever came here—but I'm not now, I'm glad, because of that lad's success! I'm glad, too, because of your love, my brother!"

CHAPTER XVI

In Stress and Storm

The sun, well up toward the zenith, shone fair, and yet there was a strange, almost wintry paleness in the sunlight, and nearly all way round, the horizon was banked with solid-looking, low-lying, thunder-purple clouds; while every now and then a blast of wind came tearing over the earth blowing a million broad green corn blades, taut and smooth, in one direction, till each field looked like a splendid, silken banner—the green triumphant banner of the tiller of the soil. Then a calmness followed, yet all through the late summer day one could feel the threat of coming storm.

Like a small harp whose strings had been roughly swept by an unskilled hand, May's every nerve seemed vibrating within her, for she had experienced pleasure, pained-humiliation, fear, surprise and joy all in the space of one forenoon, and flushing and paling, her small hands trembling, she ran back and forth bringing bits of sticks and some old pea-brush to her grandmother for the feeding of the fire beneath the soap-kettle, that hung out in the open place back of the smoke-house. Twice she had eagerly tried to speak but the white-capped old head had been shaken slightly, and

a warning glance sent toward the smoke-house, from which a few moments later Catharine had emerged; and Grandma straining her feeble old arms over the stirring of the heavy, ropy mass in the kettle and May squatting like a toad, silently feeding the fire, sustained as best they could the pale anger of her long glare at them.

That morning early Dred Hollister had ridden up to the fence and, calling Mrs. Gallaway to the door, had laughingly told her he had a whole load of messages to leave at her house and asked if he might see Mrs. Parsell and little May Marsh, too? Unwillingly Kate had called to her mother, and while waiting her coming Dred delivered, for young Cy Toler, strict injunction not to forget her invitation to his wedding dance—which was to be given by the Browns that Friday night.

“Why for Friday?” asked Kate.

“Well,” replied Dred, “they just couldn’t get the minister any other day, and (with a laugh) Cy says, when he first told Essie about it, the whole bang Brown crowd charged him with spinning a yarn, and trying to frighten Essie into backing out, rather than risk marrying on Friday, and he says it was a regular case of ‘Friday or shot-guns’ for him. So, Mrs. Gallaway, the dance will be given at Brown’s place to-night and your family, including quite particularly Mrs. Marsh, will surely be expected.”

Then the Grandmother came, hobbling around the

house, and young Dred jumped down inside the fence to run and meet her and take both her hands in greeting; an action that instantly brought anger to Kate's eyes. She would have been more angry had she guessed that a little wad of gum-opium had passed from his warm brown hand to the pallid, wrinkled one of the woman. Dred glanced at Kate, hoping she would go in, but she stolidly stood her ground.

"Better mount, my boy," said Grandmother. "That horse won't stand well unhitched." "Oh!" laughed Dred, "you can't find it in your heart to call me 'boy' now! Why, Mrs. Parsell, this is my twenty-first birthday. Mrs. Stanway gave me a couple hours off, in honor of the occasion, so that I might see Mother a few minutes."

He glanced again at Catharine, but she added no word to her mother's hearty congratulations; he had not told the news to her personally, hence the silence.

"Mother," went on Dred, "says Grandfather's plumb beset for some head-cheese, and killing time not being very far off, she would be glad if you would tell me your receipt, Mrs. Parsell, as Grandfather says that that you used to make for Old Man Parsell was the best he ever tasted."

The old woman's face brightened, a slight pink showed on her cheeks. It was so sweet to feel of use to some one once more, and straightway Dred was checking off on his fingers all the scaldings and scrapings and cut-

tings and choppings and spicings and pressings, necessary to the production of that delectable preparation known as head-cheese.

When he was quite sure of it all, he asked again for May. She came running, always delighted to see him, and as he found Mrs. Gallaway had no intention of leaving them, he said gaily: "Don't you want to ride a little way with me up the road and back—or are you afraid of the horse?"

"I don't know if Aunt will let me," said May.

"Why, of course, she will!" asserted Dred, sweeping the child up and dropping her on the other side of the fence. So in another moment he had May before him, as he rode barebacked that morning, and they were trotting off up the road.

Then May learned that Uncle John Parsell had told Dred that Mama Selina was coming back to her May that very day; and May turned and clasped her arms about his neck and kissed him for very joy of the news he brought, and he told her how it was his birthday, and what he had received and what he had done because of the day. And May laughed and laughed, and had insisted on getting down and walking home, for she knew she would catch a dreadful scolding; and she wished to save herself the shame of another person's hearing it.

She clutched to her breast a small blue bound book called "Emily Herbert," a gift from Dred, and what

with the delight of a new story to read and the joy of expecting her mother, she danced along the dusty road, almost ready to fly with excitement.

Suddenly she heard the distressful "weeet—weeet—weeet!" of a young chicken in trouble, and she waded through the high thick weeds at the road-side to see what was the matter. A half-grown fowl had tried to squeeze through a place in the fence and had one claw caught under a strong splinter and could not move. May placed her precious gift in safety and bent to release the frightened creature, when she heard the quick, light, sharp clip of a fast trotting horse—work horses were common on this road, but not trotters like that. May rose in her little green and white gingham dress and sun-bonnet, and looked down the road to see—a buggy—a slashing bright bay with black points—and driving was—May dropped in the weeds like a shot bird, holding her very breath until the music of that swift unbroken trot was out of her ears—for the man who drove was, as May put it, "The man that says he's Mr. Masker, but isn't."

"You brazen little brat!" cried Catharine Gallaway. "If he made you a present, 'twas 'cause yer begged it offen him! Hangin' 'bout men at your age!"

"Catharine!" remonstrated Grandma.

"You hold your tongue! when people get ter be helpless an' useless an' a burden ter all 'bout 'em, it's time

for 'em ter keep quiet, an' not interfere in what doesn't consarn 'em!"

May, of course, could not tell them that this book was a return for her help in teaching Dred to read, and the coarse abuse heaped upon her would have crushed the child, but for that sweet knowledge that her mother was coming back, this very day, though she was too frightened to mention the matter to her aunt, as she had intended doing. The other children were dancing like dervishes about a fire in the lane where they were roasting ears of corn for a great Prodigal-Son feast, and, as May had planned it all, and herself was to be the father, who was to see afar off, Melissa as the prodigal son, and had arranged with Jack that, for two extra ears' payment, he was to be the fatted calf, while Will, as the dissatisfied elder brother, was to come and jaw them all the time they feasted. It was very hard to bear, when Aunt Catharine ordered her back from the lane, for bidding "airy child of hern to dare ter play with such a pushin', sly, two-faced, rickety brat!"

So May went to help her grandmother; while the vexed young crew revengefully made faces behind the maternal back, and pretty Melissa recklessly called out: "Say, May, who's to be the swine for me to eat husks with?" and silently but energetically, May pointed to old Watch, and then the noisy play went on.

At last Aunt Kate came out and filled the tin wash-basin and hung up 'Lonzo's shaving glass by the door,

and the watching woman and child knew she was about to make a toilet and be ready for the coming of Old Man Toler and the lawyer, who were expected this afternoon after disappointing them all the day before.

"May," said Grandma, "squatting down there in your pale-green clothes, you look like an extra big *katy-did*." At which the child cried: "*Katy-did—katy-did*," and Grandma, in the deepest possible voice, responded: "*Katy-did*'unt!" "She did! she did!" insisted May, and laughed with delight, for whatever touched her imagination gave instant pleasure; and accepting this remark as a permission to speak at last, she instantly brought forward her small budget of news: "Oh, Grandma, isn't it funny for my Mr. Dred to have a birthday and give presents away himself? He told a story too, not a wicked lie, you know, but a—a sort of love story or fib, to 'ceive Mrs. Hollister. He didn' ever give her a present yet, and she would only get just a common calico for herself, he said. So first he went to the store and said Mr. Stanway would be back any day now, and would the store-man trust him till then for some things, and he said yes, and then he did tell Mrs. Hollister he wanted to give my mama a dress, for helping him so much, and she went and (laughing with glee), Grandma, she buyed the nicest woolen, merino or 'paca—Dred can't tell just what, only the best they had, and—and linings and buttons he thought of too, and it was all for her own self! And he telled her (Oh, May)

it was the first act of his freedom! Yes, that's what he said, Grandma—and that he could not be scolded 'cause he was a man now! And he laughed so, he don't do that very often (but it's lovely when he does, 'cause he laughs clear up into his hair). And Mrs. Hollister cried a little, then she said: 'So I can't scold you, eh? Well, I'm strong enough to punish you for fibbing—even if you are a man!' and she caught him and held his shoulders dreadful tight and she put seven big kisses on his lips and seven on each eye, and he pulled and pulled like everything! But he never got away till he had twenty-one kisses right on his face, if he was a man! And he said: 'Well, if you're that strong, Mother, I guess I'll have to behave myself yet awhile.' Then she was sorry for what she did, 'cause she says young men hate to be kissed; and the way his eyes danced, Grandma, I think he had 'ceived her again some way! Then she gave to him a lovely red book, all gold edged, and his father's name written in, and her name written in, and I asked him: 'Was he going to put all his children in it?' "

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stupid, country lout ever had! Then he told me my Mama was coming home to-day, and——”

“What?” exclaimed Grandma, “is Selina coming back to-day? Strange, oh, they had better far have listened to me. She would have forgiven, had they confessed at once! But now—now! May, you did not tell your aunt, did you?”

“No, M’am, she frights me so, and then there’s going to be company.”

“No, not exactly company, only some business to be attended too. Perhaps Jason and Kate and ’Lonzo may go to the dance to-night—then (eagerly) you and your mother and I can have a real visit.”

“Oh!” delightedly exclaimed May, and just then a lanky boy climbed over the fence and called out: “**Mis’** Gallaway, Old Man Toler says as how that lawyer ain’t com’ yit, an’ they can’t git here now till candle-light, but ter hav’ all yer papers and things handy, an’ they’ll be here, sure.”

The boy left, and Kate—swore! Not the invertebrate, sneaking, dog ’gone, dod-rotted or dum-gasted kind of swear—but profanity straight, hot, strong. Oaths delivered with emphasis and precision; and ’Lonzo, coming home to dress for the drive to the dance, bent an appreciative ear, saying approvingly: “**Sounds like father, when he was a pilot on a river-boat. I wonder if I’ll git hot water all over me if I ast for enuff ter shave with.**”

It soon became evident to home judges that measured by the sumptuary laws governing Adams County, 'Lonzo was to be the heavy swell, or according to local idiom, the "buck dandy" of the dance. Quite unembarrassed by the presence of four observant children, 'Lonzo passed calmly through the mysteries tonsorial and sartorial, leading up to the heights of full dress. Their interest never flagged for a moment, and when the bar-soap and crash-towel had done their perfect work, and the razor that seemed to have teeth had done its roughly imperfect work, May remarked, gazing at the scoured, red neck and chest and bleeding countenance: "I guess what skin you've got left smarts dreadful, Mr. 'Lonzo, don't it? My mama's got some bay-rum in her headache bottle, that she puts on me when I get bit by things; don't you want some?"

"Wal', yes," reflectively answered 'Lonzo, gazing mournfully at his scarified cheeks as reflected in the shaving glass. "I 'low it'll stop this infernal spread of gore." May, however, moved so slowly that he added: "Don't do it, May, if she wouldn't like yer to."

"Oh," grinned Melissa, "she's afraid you'll do yer hair while she's gone."

"No, I won't," gravely promised the fascinating one. "You go with her too, jest a minute, Melissa."

When they returned with the little bottle of bay-rum, 'Lonzo was arrayed in a pair of black trousers, whose like May dimly felt she would never look upon again;

CHAPTER XVI

In Stress and Storm

The sun, well up toward the zenith, shone fair, and yet there was a strange, almost wintry paleness in the sunlight, and nearly all way round, the horizon was banked with solid-looking, low-lying, thunder-purple clouds; while every now and then a blast of wind came tearing over the earth blowing a million broad green corn blades, taut and smooth, in one direction, till each field looked like a splendid, silken banner—the green triumphant banner of the tiller of the soil. Then a calmness followed, yet all through the late summer day one could feel the threat of coming storm.

Like a small harp whose strings had been roughly swept by an unskilled hand, May's every nerve seemed vibrating within her, for she had experienced pleasure, pained-humiliation, fear, surprise and joy all in the space of one forenoon, and flushing and paling, her small hands trembling, she ran back and forth bringing bits of sticks and some old pea-brush to her grandmother for the feeding of the fire beneath the soap-kettle, that hung out in the open place back of the smoke-house. Twice she had eagerly tried to speak but the white-capped old head had been shaken slightly, and

a warning glance sent toward the smoke-house, from which a few moments later Catharine had emerged; and Grandma straining her feeble old arms over the stirring of the heavy, ropy mass in the kettle and May squatting like a toad, silently feeding the fire, sustained as best they could the pale anger of her long glare at them.

That morning early Dred Hollister had ridden up to the fence and, calling Mrs. Gallaway to the door, had laughingly told her he had a whole load of messages to leave at her house and asked if he might see Mrs. Parsell and little May Marsh, too? Unwillingly Kate had called to her mother, and while waiting her coming Dred delivered, for young Cy Toler, strict injunction not to forget her invitation to his wedding dance—which was to be given by the Browns that Friday night.

“Why for Friday?” asked Kate.

“Well,” replied Dred, “they just couldn’t get the minister any other day, and (with a laugh) Cy says, when he first told Essie about it, the whole bang Brown crowd charged him with spinning a yarn, and trying to frighten Essie into backing out, rather than risk marrying on Friday, and he says it was a regular case of ‘Friday or shot-guns’ for him. So, Mrs. Gallaway, the dance will be given at Brown’s place to-night and your family, including quite particularly Mrs. Marsh, will surely be expected.”

Then the Grandmother came, hobbling around the

house, and young Dred jumped down inside the fence to run and meet her and take both her hands in greeting; an action that instantly brought anger to Kate's eyes. She would have been more angry had she guessed that a little wad of gum-opium had passed from his warm brown hand to the pallid, wrinkled one of the woman. Dred glanced at Kate, hoping she would go in, but she stolidly stood her ground.

"Better mount, my boy," said Grandmother. "That horse won't stand well unhitched." "Oh!" laughed Dred, "you can't find it in your heart to call me 'boy' now! Why, Mrs. Parsell, this is my twenty-first birthday. Mrs. Stanway gave me a couple hours off, in honor of the occasion, so that I might see Mother a few minutes."

He glanced again at Catharine, but she added no word to her mother's hearty congratulations; he had not told the news to her personally, hence the silence.

"Mother," went on Dred, "says Grandfather's plumb beset for some head-cheese, and killing time not being very far off, she would be glad if you would tell me your receipt, Mrs. Parsell, as Grandfather says that that you used to make for Old Man Parsell was the best he ever tasted."

The old woman's face brightened, a slight pink showed on her cheeks. It was so sweet to feel of use to some one once more, and straightway Dred was checking off on his fingers all the scaldings and scrapings and cut-

tings and choppings and spicings and pressings, necessary to the production of that delectable preparation known as head-cheese.

When he was quite sure of it all, he asked again for May. She came running, always delighted to see him, and as he found Mrs. Gallaway had no intention of leaving them, he said gaily: "Don't you want to ride a little way with me up the road and back—or are you afraid of the horse?"

"I don't know if Aunt will let me," said May.

"Why, of course, she will!" asserted Dred, sweeping the child up and dropping her on the other side of the fence. So in another moment he had May before him, as he rode barebacked that morning, and they were trotting off up the road.

Then May learned that Uncle John Parsell had told Dred that Mama Selina was coming back to her May that very day; and May turned and clasped her arms about his neck and kissed him for very joy of the news he brought, and he told her how it was his birthday, and what he had received and what he had done because of the day. And May laughed and laughed, and had insisted on getting down and walking home, for she knew she would catch a dreadful scolding; and she wished to save herself the shame of another person's hearing it.

She clutched to her breast a small blue bound book called "Emily Herbert," a gift from Dred, and what

with the delight of a new story to read and the joy of expecting her mother, she danced along the dusty road, almost ready to fly with excitement.

Suddenly she heard the distressful "weet—weet—weet!" of a young chicken in trouble, and she waded through the high thick weeds at the road-side to see what was the matter. A half-grown fowl had tried to squeeze through a place in the fence and had one claw caught under a strong splinter and could not move. May placed her precious gift in safety and bent to release the frightened creature, when she heard the quick, light, sharp clip of a fast trotting horse—work horses were common on this road, but not trotters like that. May rose in her little green and white gingham dress and sun-bonnet, and looked down the road to see—a buggy—a slashing bright bay with black points—and driving was—May dropped in the weeds like a shot bird, holding her very breath until the music of that swift unbroken trot was out of her ears—for the man who drove was, as May put it, "The man that says he's Mr. Masker, but isn't."

"You brazen little brat!" cried Catharine Gallaway. "If he made you a present, 'twas 'cause yer begged it offen him! Hangin' 'bout men at your age!"

"Catharine!" remonstrated Grandma.

"You hold your tongue! when people get ter be helpless an' useless an' a burden ter all 'bout 'em, it's time

for 'em ter keep quiet, an' not interfere in what doesn't consarn 'em!"

May, of course, could not tell them that this book was a return for her help in teaching Dred to read, and the coarse abuse heaped upon her would have crushed the child, but for that sweet knowledge that her mother was coming back, this very day, though she was too frightened to mention the matter to her aunt, as she had intended doing. The other children were dancing like dervishes about a fire in the lane where they were roasting ears of corn for a great Prodigal-Son feast, and, as May had planned it all, and herself was to be the father, who was to see afar off, Melissa as the prodigal son, and had arranged with Jack that, for two extra ears' payment, he was to be the fatted calf, while Will, as the dissatisfied elder brother, was to come and jaw them all the time they feasted. It was very hard to bear, when Aunt Catharine ordered her back from the lane, for bidding "airy child of hern to dare ter play with such a pushin', sly, two-faced, rickety brat!"

So May went to help her grandmother; while the vexed young crew revengefully made faces behind the maternal back, and pretty Melissa recklessly called out: "Say, May, who's to be the swine for me to eat husks with?" and silently but energetically, May pointed to old Watch, and then the noisy play went on.

At last Aunt Kate came out and filled the tin wash-basin and hung up 'Lonzo's shaving glass by the door,

and the watching woman and child knew she was about to make a toilet and be ready for the coming of Old Man Toler and the lawyer, who were expected this afternoon after disappointing them all the day before.

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“Oh!” delightedly exclaimed May, and just then a lanky boy climbed over the fence and called out: “Mis’ Gallaway, Old Man Toler says as how that lawyer ain’t com’ yit, an’ they can’t git here now till candle-light, but ter hav’ all yer papers and things handy, an’ they’ll be here, sure.”

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"No, I won't," gravely promised the fascinating one. "You go with her too, jest a minute, Melissa."

When they returned with the little bottle of bay-rum, 'Lonzo was arrayed in a pair of black trousers, whose like May dimly felt she would never look upon again;

and when he put on a pair of blackened shoes, the boys yelled like Comanches—and really it turned out afterward that there was but one other pair at the ball. Then he hooked out with his forefinger some orange-colored pomade from a bottle that said “bear’s grease,” and Jason coming along said: “That’s a dog gon’d lie, ’Lonzo. That’s marrer an’ lard. It smells right good, but thar’s no bar’s grease within ’er thousand miles of it.”

“Wal’, don’ git work’d all-up ’bout it, Gallaway. Their grease may be hard ter com’ at, but bars with sore heads are allers with us.”

Then Jason knew something was wrong and went in to hear of the postponed meeting, and have his corn-cob pipe hurled through the window and a clean shirt dashed in his face. ’Lonzo breathing hard over the turning of his hair into a sausage curl on the top of his head, repeated as the pipe passed him on the porch:

“How doth the little busy B—— improve each shining hour,
And throw good corn-cob pipes away, ter prove her wifely power.”

Instantly May’s voice rose in pained denunciation: “Now, Mr. ’Lonzo, you know quite well you did not say that right!”

“Wal’,” argued the guilty one, “Yer’d scarce expect one of my age——”

"Your age! why you're years older and bigger than I am——"

"Oh, pshaw!" broke in Melissa, "do let him make ther side curls! who cares 'bout a busy B——, anyway!"

Then to smooth the frown from May's brow, this exquisite requested her help in buttoning his short-waisted, black-velvet vest, with the red and blue flowers, that made it a thing to wonder at. In his white shirt-bosom was pinned a double breast-pin with a chain connecting the two. A black satin stock, so thick and so tight that his eyes bulged slightly from his encrimsoned countenance, just *didn't* strangle him; and hanging on the handle of the well windlass was his coat, which he would only put on after supper. A thing of beauty, a work of art the children felt him to be, and May spreading her skirts began to hum a waltz, and 'Lonzo, catching her by one shoulder and one hand, whirled heavily around with her—stopping to cry: "Wal', dog'gone my skin if you can't dance like 'er grown-up! You've got ter come ter this bust-out, mother or no mother—clothes or no clothes!"

And just then a woman carrying a heavy-looking bag came down the road and began to clamber over the fence. Watch rushed out with savage sounding welcome. May screamed: "My Mama! my own Mama!" Kate gasped—"Selina!" Grandma closed her eyes, and Jason said: "Wal', God-all-mighty!"

The embarrassment of the family was painfully evident to Selina. Deeply wounded at first, she suddenly recalled the dance, and thinking she understood, she said: "Don't let me interfere with your arrangements, good people! Start as soon as possible—so as not to miss any of the fun. May and I will keep house for you."

But one hope was left in Kate's breast. If only she could induce Selina to go with 'Lonzo to this wedding-party, all might yet be well—but she argued in vain. Selina was too tired—she had come home in the wagon of a neighbor of Mr. Brooks's and he had dropped her at the cross-roads and she had walked and carried the bag—she did not know the people either—and anyway it was blowing up to storm; besides, her dancing days were over, etc. "But Kate must go, as she saw she was dressed and ready."

It had ended in Jason's saying to 'Lonzo: "Take one of ther horses an' ther sulky, or saddle—jest as yer please—an' pack off to ther dance by yerself; we can't none of us go."

Selina had brought some candy-sticks and bull's-eyes for the children, who were all fond of her, and, as they whooped and jumped noisily about, Kate said, sharply:

"Yer might 'er given us warnin' of yer comin'!"

Selina glanced at May, whose wide pleading blue eyes told her much, and she answered: "I'm sorry that my coming was so unwelcome that a warning was re-

quired. I had no messenger—nor could I know that Mrs. Brooks's attacks, being mostly nervous, were uncertain as to duration."

And at that moment two men came to the door, Mr. Zachary Toler and Mr. Cephus Gridley, a sandy young man of pale complexion and bright ferrety eyes; who carried a cloth bag in one hand. Six grown-ups and four children crowded the small room uncomfortably, and privacy there was as unobtainable as the joy of Paradise.

The table with its black oil-cloth cover held the inadequate lamp, which seemed to perspire greasily as it smoked nervously from one side of the burner, and Jack helped to make things pleasant by remarking as distinctly as he could with a bull's-eye in either cheek: "Aunt Selina never leaves a burned ear on the wick when she fixes the lamp; she rubs the burn'd part all off even—with a rag."

"H-uh!" ejaculated his mother. "Pity you hadn't tended to it yourse'f, yer know so all fired much 'bout it, an' yer aunt!"

Papers were brought from the bag and spread out—papers were brought from the trunk. A mouldy old bottle of ink was tested and rejected by the sharp-eyed young man, who produced a small bottle, enclosed in a spring-topped box, that magnet-like drew the boys to its neighborhood, where they hung on the back of his chair, watching every movement.

May, greatly excited by her mother's protecting presence, sidled up to Melissa and smilingly looked on, as eagerly as the others—for once ignorant of her aunt's condemning glance.

A pretty hot argument was going on between Old Man Toler and Jay Gallaway, about a boundary line, and a paper was held open on the table by a slim white Gridley thumb on one side and a leathery, brown Toler thumb on the other side, while Gallaway's square, crack-nailed finger followed some lines drawn in ink: "Cy Toler's line ends," he said, "jest this side the covered bridge—then my line strikes in here at this 'er clump of hickory timber—the only hickory within two mile or more, an' it runs right down here whar' the creek makes the bound'ry on the east—that's plain enuff?"

Mr. Gridley looked closely and nodded acknowledgment.

"Y-a-as—y-a-as," drawled old Toler, "but you know's well as I do that ther great freshit of four year' ago turned that crick outen ther old bed an' it cut right inter the path of that little brook of mine, an' is now runnin' plumb seven foot inter my land. Gridley, I'll show yer to-morrow ther old bed of the stream, dry as a bone now; but the one that's sat down here. Now, Gallaway, your cattle raise old tunkate on my place, an' you've got ter keep 'em from trespassin', if yer have ter put up a fence."

"You had better arrange these things amicably," ad-

vised the young lawyer, and Kate angrily dropped on the table before Jason a couple of canvas bags, as a hint to get to the farm buying; but this she did with her back to Selina, who was trying to speak in a low voice to her mother over by the window.

Then there was talk of clearances and acres and improvements and dollars—dollars, dollars; and at last the lawyer opened his ink bottle and squaring himself to write, knocked from the crowded table a shower of papers. The children screamed with delight and scrambled to pick them up. Will rose with the greater number clutched to his breast. May had the bag—Melissa caught the gleam of red sealing-wax: “Oh, give *me* that!” she cried, and pulled the paper away from the boy.

May, in her new security and excitement, forgot caution utterly and exclaimed: “Oh, that’s the will, Melissa!”

A lightning-swift silence—broken by the malicious laughter of Toler, that for dryness was like the rattling of shrivelled peas in a gourd; and as Gallaway and his wife simultaneously ordered: “Bring that here, Melissa!” May, laying the bag down, reached for a paper and triumphantly holding it out, said: “See, Mama, and this is the paper that says Selina Parsell—and that’s you, Mama—are dead.”

With the cry of rage: “You liar, you infernal little liar!” Kate Gallaway struck the child across the face

with the whole strength of her body, and Grandmother held out her trembling arms, as May reeled into them. Selina with a savage bound caught her sister with a grip of steel by both shoulders—but suddenly loosened her hold and clenching her hands hard upon her breast, gasped thickly: "Take her away!—quick!—*quick!* Let her condition save her!" and Jason drew Kate back into the shelter of his arms.

Then Selina turned and looked at the little face resting on the grandmother's bosom. She pointed to the distinct outline of Kate's hand, burning red, across white cheek and temple, and added hoarsely: "That mark will cost you more than has all the evil doing of your evil life!"

"Seliny! Seliny!" pleaded Jason.

She ignored him: "You have proclaimed my child a liar, Mrs. Gallaway—well, now let's see what *you* are!" She sprang upon the stupefied Melissa and snatching the will, opened it out.

Kate screamed and tore fiercely at Jason's restraining hands. With proud humility, Selina went on: "I have supported myself since I was eight, but—I—I can't read writing. Mother, please read *this* will aloud!" The old woman shrank back in mortal terror, and Selina hastily added: "No, I won't ask you to sign your own death warrant!" She paused—then passing the will to Old Man Toler, asked: "Will *you* read that will aloud, sir? I was abandoned and forgotten, I know

that—but my grandfather was a just man; and I want to know if he cut off my dear brother without a penny!”

“Jay Gallaway!” cried Kate, “be a man and tear that paper outen his hands!”

“See here, Toler,” mumbled Jason, “you hand that over here—the law doesn’t permit any such doin’s as ther forcible readin’ of private papers!”

But old Toler held the document behind him, replying: “Now, Gallaway, you’re not in a position ter appeal ter the law. This hull thing ’s irreg’lar. You’ve trusted ter the habit our people have of mindin’ only ther’ own business, but yer don’t s’pose that they haven’t had their thoughts ’bout Old Man Parsell that war a rich man when he war a livin’ Mormon, but war such a poor man arter he seceded and died?”

“Gol darn yer!” rumbled Gallaway, helplessly, while clear and plain Old Man Toler read aloud the will, and its generous provisions for all. A roar of wind shook the little house and the draught sent the flame flaring wildly in the lamp-chimney.

Mr. Gridley took a look at the document and muttered: “Never been probated—either mighty bold or mighty stupid. Huh-huh!—I see, all ready money and no real estate to transfer. Death of one heir sworn to—another defrauded by——”

“Stop!—please stop!” ’Twas Selina. With wild eyes she stared at her sister as if she had never seen her before; “Ingrate daughter! Judas sister! Liar!

Trickster! Thief! Inhuman monster! You—who held the helpless dead for money—probably already paid!”

A shriek, long and piercing, rose from Kate’s white lips. Selina turned toward her child. Another awful blast of wind made her pause—then she said: “May, get your hat.”

“Seliny! Selina!” cried Jason and Grandmother together. The child tied her little rough straw hat tight, and stood beside her mother—who stooped and drew the packed and still unopened bag toward her.

“Wait!” cried Old Man Toler, “till I take Gridley hum’, an’ I’ll com’ back for yer!”

“No!” answered the woman, “I cannot breathe the same air with this monster!”

“Whar’ be yer goin’?” he asked.

“I don’t know; come, May!”

“Selina!” quavered the old woman, “I was made to abandon you when you were helpless—but must you, oh, my dear, must you abandon me now, when I am helpless?”

“If God wills it—I’ll aid you yet, Mother—but I must go now!” she kissed the working old face, took her child by the hand and opened the door. The wind dashed her backward—slowly she recovered her footing.

“For God’s sake, stop her!” cried Jason. “It’s not ’er night for a dog ter be outside!”

“No honest dog would remain inside this house!”

she replied, and went out and closed the door. As she dropped the bag over the fence she heard the long piercing scream of Catharine Gallaway and, with curling lips, said: "More fits."

Then she stooped low to hear what May was shouting at her: "Mama, can't we go to the covered bridge out of the storm?"

"I don't know the way," said Selina.

"I do, Mama," replied the child, and so hand in hand bending before the blast, they struggled down the lonely road toward their only place of shelter, the old covered bridge.

CHAPTER XVII

The Wedding Dance

When 'Lonzo was well on his way toward the Brown place, he was surprised to see Nash Gallaway, "hoofin' it" to the dance. He explained that the horses were "so plumb tired haulin' all day that he jest couldn't make one of 'em tote him down to the bottom. He hadn't wanted to go anyway, but his mother thought it war a duty to encourage any straight out and out marryin' here on earth—seein' ther' wasn't any chance at all in the next world."

"But," said 'Lonzo, "it's so darn'd dark I can't see what yer packin' over your shoulder."

"Oh, them's my boots, 'Lonz—I've got my socks inside my hat. I ain't walkin' in my feet to save leather, only them peg soles hurt so when you first get back into 'em, that I go plumb crazy. So I'll wait till I hear the dogs fightin' and then I'll know I'm clost 'nough to set down and put 'em on."

He had leaned heavily against a tree as he spoke and 'Lonzo knew how tired he must be, so he said: "See here—of all human critters I'm the one I least like to drive alone with. So, Nash, you listen clost now—hitch them boots 'neath the sulky, then hop up

here and throw yer arm 'bout my slender waist and we'll each stretch out one leg and thrust the other under us to sit on and so as one man we can proudly drive to the shindig."

As they drove thus precariously balanced, Nash related the fact of Masker's return, and of his "biggoty manner."

"I saw him too," said 'Lonzo, "and he chucked me the cold shoulder—though Lord knows he used to chin fast enough when he war beatin' up trade. What the dickens do yer suppose he's back for anyhow? Cy Toler, Old Cy, I mean, says he acted like a man hidin' out, and I can't find where he put up that trotter of hissen. He's skulkin', that's sure, but what for 's what puzzles me."

He would have been still more puzzled could he have known that he had passed, drawn up in the wood just off the road, Masker, his buggy and his horse—the latter with bag-wrapped feet, that his stamping might not attract attention; and from that point he was watching eagerly as the wagons loaded with noisy young people crawled or jogged along the rough woods road, that was the shortest way to the "bottom" lands.

Now and then a horse passed carrying double—the woman behind with her dress and white skirts carefully covered with a shawl, and holding a small parcel or a box containing her bits of finery, such as a bow for the neck, an artificial flower or back comb for the

The embarrassment of the family was painfully evident to Selina. Deeply wounded at first, she suddenly recalled the dance, and thinking she understood, she said: "Don't let me interfere with your arrangements, good people! Start as soon as possible—so as not to miss any of the fun. May and I will keep house for you."

But one hope was left in Kate's breast. If only she could induce Selina to go with 'Lonzo to this wedding-party, all might yet be well—but she argued in vain. Selina was too tired—she had come home in the wagon of a neighbor of Mr. Brooks's and he had dropped her at the cross-roads and she had walked and carried the bag—she did not know the people either—and anyway it was blowing up to storm; besides, her dancing days were over, etc. "But Kate must go, as she saw she was dressed and ready."

It had ended in Jason's saying to 'Lonzo: "Take one of ther horses an' ther sulky, or saddle—jest as yer please—an' pack off to ther dance by yerself; we can't none of us go."

Selina had brought some candy-sticks and bull's-eyes for the children, who were all fond of her, and, as they whooped and jumped noisily about, Kate said, sharply:

"Yer might 'er given us warnin' of yer comin'!"

Selina glanced at May, whose wide pleading blue eyes told her much, and she answered: "I'm sorry that my coming was so unwelcome that a warning was re-

quired. I had no messenger—nor could I know that Mrs. Brooks's attacks, being mostly nervous, were uncertain as to duration."

And at that moment two men came to the door, Mr. Zachary Toler and Mr. Cephus Gridley, a sandy young man of pale complexion and bright ferrety eyes; who carried a cloth bag in one hand. Six grown-ups and four children crowded the small room uncomfortably, and privacy there was as unobtainable as the joy of Paradise.

The table with its black oil-cloth cover held the inadequate lamp, which seemed to perspire greasily as it smoked nervously from one side of the burner, and Jack helped to make things pleasant by remarking as distinctly as he could with a bull's-eye in either cheek: "Aunt Selina never leaves a burned ear on the wick when she fixes the lamp; she rubs the burn'd part all off even—with a rag."

"H-uh!" ejaculated his mother. "Pity you hadn't tended to it yourse'f, yer know so all fired much 'bout it, an' yer aunt!"

Papers were brought from the bag and spread out—papers were brought from the trunk. A mouldy old bottle of ink was tested and rejected by the sharp-eyed young man, who produced a small bottle, enclosed in a spring-topped box, that magnet-like drew the boys to its neighborhood, where they hung on the back of his chair, watching every movement.

with the delight of a new story to read and the joy of expecting her mother, she danced along the dusty road, almost ready to fly with excitement.

Suddenly she heard the distressful "weeet—weeet—weeet!" of a young chicken in trouble, and she waded through the high thick weeds at the road-side to see what was the matter. A half-grown fowl had tried to squeeze through a place in the fence and had one claw caught under a strong splinter and could not move. May placed her precious gift in safety and bent to release the frightened creature, when she heard the quick, light, sharp clip of a fast trotting horse—work horses were common on this road, but not trotters like that. May rose in her little green and white gingham dress and sun-bonnet, and looked down the road to see—a buggy—a slashing bright bay with black points—and driving was—May dropped in the weeds like a shot bird, holding her very breath until the music of that swift unbroken trot was out of her ears—for the man who drove was, as May put it, "The man that says he's Mr. Masker, but isn't."

"You brazen little brat!" cried Catharine Gallaway. "If he made you a present, 'twas 'cause yer begged it offen him! Hangin' 'bout men at your age!"

"Catharine!" remonstrated Grandma.

"You hold your tongue! when people get ter be helpless an' useless an' a burden ter all 'bout 'em, it's time

for 'em ter keep quiet, an' not interfere in what doesn't consarn 'em!"

May, of course, could not tell them that this book was a return for her help in teaching Dred to read, and the coarse abuse heaped upon her would have crushed the child, but for that sweet knowledge that her mother was coming back, this very day, though she was too frightened to mention the matter to her aunt, as she had intended doing. The other children were dancing like dervishes about a fire in the lane where they were roasting ears of corn for a great Prodigal-Son feast, and, as May had planned it all, and herself was to be the father, who was to see afar off, Melissa as the prodigal son, and had arranged with Jack that, for two extra ears' payment, he was to be the fatted calf, while Will, as the dissatisfied elder brother, was to come and jaw them all the time they feasted. It was very hard to bear, when Aunt Catharine ordered her back from the lane, for bidding "airy child of hern to dare ter play with such a pushin', sly, two-faced, rickety brat!"

So May went to help her grandmother; while the vexed young crew revengefully made faces behind the maternal back, and pretty Melissa recklessly called out: "Say, May, who's to be the swine for me to eat husks with?" and silently but energetically, May pointed to old Watch, and then the noisy play went on.

At last Aunt Kate came out and filled the tin wash-basin and hung up 'Lonzo's shaving glass by the door,

and the watching woman and child knew she was about to make a toilet and be ready for the coming of Old Man Toler and the lawyer, who were expected this afternoon after disappointing them all the day before.

"May," said Grandma, "squatting down there in your pale-green clothes, you look like an extra big *katy-did*." At which the child cried: "*Katy-did—katy-did*," and Grandma, in the deepest possible voice, responded: "*Katy-did*'unt!" "She did! she did!" insisted May, and laughed with delight, for whatever touched her imagination gave instant pleasure; and accepting this remark as a permission to speak at last, she instantly brought forward her small budget of news: "Oh, Grandma, isn't it funny for my Mr. Dred to have a birthday and give presents away himself? He told a story too, not a wicked lie, you know, but a—a sort of love story or fib, to 'ceive Mrs. Hollister. He didn' ever give her a present yet, and she would only get just a common calico for herself, he said. So first he went to the store and said Mr. Stanway would be back any day now, and would the store-man trust him till then for some things, and he said yes, and then he did tell Mrs. Hollister he wanted to give my mama a dress, for helping him so much, and she went and (laughing with glee), Grandma, she buyed the nicest woolen, merino or 'paca—Dred can't tell just what, only the best they had, and—and linings and buttons he thought of too, and it was all for her own self! And he telled her (Oh, May)

it was the first act of his freedom! Yes, that's what he said, Grandma—and that he could not be scolded 'cause he was a man now! And he laughed so, he don't do that very often (but it's lovely when he does, 'cause he laughs clear up into his hair). And Mrs. Hollister cried a little, then she said: 'So I can't scold you, eh? Well, I'm strong enough to punish you for fibbing—even if you are a man!' and she caught him and held his shoulders dreadful tight and she put seven big kisses on his lips and seven on each eye, and he pulled and pulled like everything! But he never got away till he had twenty-one kisses right on his face, if he was a man! And he said: 'Well, if you're that strong, Mother, I guess I'll have to behave myself yet awhile.' Then she was sorry for what she did, 'cause she says young men hate to be kissed; and the way his eyes danced, Grandma, I think he had 'ceived her again some way! Then she gave to him a lovely red book, all gold edged, and his father's name written in, and her name written in, and I asked him: 'Was he going to put all his children in it?' "

"Oh, May!" exclaimed Grandma.

"That's just what Mr. Dred said too: 'Oh, May!' but I said, 'in place of the Bible I mean, where the "Married-tos," and the "Died-ats," and the "Born-ofs" are written down.' And he said, 'May, you're the oldest and the youngest and the funniest and the best little friend any

stupid, country lout ever had! Then he told me my Mama was coming home to-day, and——”

“What?” exclaimed Grandma, “is Selina coming back to-day? Strange, oh, they had better far have listened to me. She would have forgiven, had they confessed at once! But now—now! May, you did not tell your aunt, did you?”

“No, M’am, she frights me so, and then there’s going to be company.”

“No, not exactly company, only some business to be attended too. Perhaps Jason and Kate and ’Lonzo may go to the dance to-night—then (eagerly) you and your mother and I can have a real visit.”

“Oh!” delightedly exclaimed May, and just then a lanky boy climbed over the fence and called out: “**Mis’** Gallaway, Old Man Toler says as how that lawyer ain’t com’ yit, an’ they can’t git here now till candle-light, but ter hav’ all yer papers and things handy, an’ they’ll be here, sure.”

The boy left, and Kate—swore! Not the invertebrate, sneaking, dog ’gone, dod-rotted or dum-gasted kind of swear—but profanity straight, hot, strong. Oaths delivered with emphasis and precision; and ’Lonzo, coming home to dress for the drive to the dance, bent an appreciative ear, saying approvingly: “**Sounds** like father, when he was a pilot on a river-boat. I wonder if I’ll git hot water all over me if I ast for enuff ter shave with.”

It soon became evident to home judges that measured by the sumptuary laws governing Adams County, 'Lonzo was to be the heavy swell, or according to local idiom, the "buck dandy" of the dance. Quite unembarrassed by the presence of four observant children, 'Lonzo passed calmly through the mysteries tonsorial and sartorial, leading up to the heights of full dress. Their interest never flagged for a moment, and when the bar-soap and crash-towel had done their perfect work, and the razor that seemed to have teeth had done its roughly imperfect work, May remarked, gazing at the scoured, red neck and chest and bleeding countenance: "I guess what skin you've got left smarts dreadful, Mr. 'Lonzo, don't it? My mama's got some bay-rum in her headache bottle, that she puts on me when I get bit by things; don't you want some?"

"Wal', yes," reflectively answered 'Lonzo, gazing mournfully at his scarified cheeks as reflected in the shaving glass. "I 'low it'll stop this infernal spread of gore." May, however, moved so slowly that he added: "Don't do it, May, if she wouldn't like yer to."

"Oh," grinned Melissa, "she's afraid you'll do yer hair while she's gone."

"No, I won't," gravely promised the fascinating one. "You go with her too, jest a minute, Melissa."

When they returned with the little bottle of bay-rum, 'Lonzo was arrayed in a pair of black trousers, whose like May dimly felt she would never look upon again;

and when he put on a pair of blackened shoes, the boys yelled like Comanches—and really it turned out afterward that there was but one other pair at the ball. Then he hooked out with his forefinger some orange-colored pomade from a bottle that said “bear’s grease,” and Jason coming along said: “That’s a dog gon’d lie, ’Lonzo. That’s marrer an’ lard. It smells right good, but thar’s no bar’s grease within ’er thousand miles of it.”

“Wal’, don’ git work’d all-up ’bout it, Gallaway. Their grease may be hard ter com’ at, but bars with sore heads are allers with us.”

Then Jason knew something was wrong and went in to hear of the postponed meeting, and have his corn-cob pipe hurled through the window and a clean shirt dashed in his face. ’Lonzo breathing hard over the turning of his hair into a sausage curl on the top of his head, repeated as the pipe passed him on the porch:

“How doth the little busy B—— improve each shining hour,
And throw good corn-cob pipes away, ter prove her wifely power.”

Instantly May’s voice rose in pained denunciation: “Now, Mr. ’Lonzo, you know quite well you **did not** say that right!”

“Wal’,” argued the guilty one, “Yer’d scarce expect one of my age——”

"Your age! why you're years older and bigger than I am——"

"Oh, pshaw!" broke in Melissa, "do let him make ther side curls! who cares 'bout a busy B——, anyway!"

Then to smooth the frown from May's brow, this exquisite requested her help in buttoning his short-waisted, black-velvet vest, with the red and blue flowers, that made it a thing to wonder at. In his white shirt-bosom was pinned a double breast-pin with a chain connecting the two. A black satin stock, so thick and so tight that his eyes bulged slightly from his encrimsoned countenance, just *didn't* strangle him; and hanging on the handle of the well windlass was his coat, which he would only put on after supper. A thing of beauty, a work of art the children felt him to be, and May spreading her skirts began to hum a waltz, and 'Lonzo, catching her by one shoulder and one hand, whirled heavily around with her—stopping to cry: "Wal', dog'gone my skin if you can't dance like 'er grown-up! You've got ter come ter this bust-out, mother or no mother—clothes or no clothes!"

And just then a woman carrying a heavy-looking bag came down the road and began to clamber over the fence. Watch rushed out with savage sounding welcome. May screamed: "My Mama! my own Mama!" Kate gasped—"Selina!" Grandma closed her eyes, and Jason said: "Wal', God-all-mighty!"

The embarrassment of the family was painfully evident to Selina. Deeply wounded at first, she suddenly recalled the dance, and thinking she understood, she said: "Don't let me interfere with your arrangements, good people! Start as soon as possible—so as not to miss any of the fun. May and I will keep house for you."

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May, greatly excited by her mother's protecting presence, sidled up to Melissa and smilingly looked on, as eagerly as the others—for once ignorant of her aunt's condemning glance.

A pretty hot argument was going on between Old Man Toler and Jay Gallaway, about a boundary line, and a paper was held open on the table by a slim white Gridley thumb on one side and a leathery, brown Toler thumb on the other side, while Gallaway's square, crack-nailed finger followed some lines drawn in ink: "Cy Toler's line ends," he said, "jest this side the covered bridge—then my line strikes in here at this 'er clump of hickory timber—the only hickory within two mile or more, an' it runs right down here whar' the creek makes the bound'ry on the east—that's plain enuff?"

Mr. Gridley looked closely and nodded acknowledgment.

"Y-a-as—y-a-as," drawled old Toler, "but you know's well as I do that ther great freshit of four year' ago turned that crick outen ther old bed an' it cut right inter the path of that little brook of mine, an' is now runnin' plumb seven foot inter my land. Gridley, I'll show yer to-morrow ther old bed of the stream, dry as a bone now; but the one that's sat down here. Now, Gallaway, your cattle raise old tunkate on my place, an' you've got ter keep 'em from trespassin', if yer have ter put up a fence."

"You had better arrange these things amicably," ad-

vised the young lawyer, and Kate angrily dropped on the table before Jason a couple of canvas bags, as a hint to get to the farm buying; but this she did with her back to Selina, who was trying to speak in a low voice to her mother over by the window.

Then there was talk of clearances and acres and improvements and dollars—dollars, dollars; and at last the lawyer opened his ink bottle and squaring himself to write, knocked from the crowded table a shower of papers. The children screamed with delight and scrambled to pick them up. Will rose with the greater number clutched to his breast. May had the bag—Melissa caught the gleam of red sealing-wax: “Oh, give *me* that!” she cried, and pulled the paper away from the boy.

May, in her new security and excitement, forgot caution utterly and exclaimed: “Oh, that’s the will, Melissa!”

A lightning-swift silence—broken by the malicious laughter of Toler, that for dryness was like the rattling of shrivelled peas in a gourd; and as Gallaway and his wife simultaneously ordered: “Bring that here, Melissa!” May, laying the bag down, reached for a paper and triumphantly holding it out, said: “See, Mama, and this is the paper that says Selina Parsell—and that’s you, Mama—are dead.”

With the cry of rage: “You liar, you infernal little liar!” Kate Gallaway struck the child across the face

with the whole strength of her body, and Grandmother held out her trembling arms, as May reeled into them. Selina with a savage bound caught her sister with a grip of steel by both shoulders—but suddenly loosened her hold and clenching her hands hard upon her breast, gasped thickly: “Take her away!—quick!—*quick!* Let her condition save her!” and Jason drew Kate back into the shelter of his arms.

Then Selina turned and looked at the little face resting on the grandmother’s bosom. She pointed to the distinct outline of Kate’s hand, burning red, across white cheek and temple, and added hoarsely: “That mark will cost you more than has all the evil doing of your evil life!”

“Seliny! Seliny!” pleaded Jason.

She ignored him: “You have proclaimed my child a liar, Mrs. Gallaway—well, now let’s see what *you* are!” She sprang upon the stupefied Melissa and snatching the will, opened it out.

Kate screamed and tore fiercely at Jason’s restraining hands. With proud humility, Selina went on: “I have supported myself since I was eight, but—I—I can’t read writing. Mother, please read this will aloud!” The old woman shrank back in mortal terror, and Selina hastily added: “No, I won’t ask you to sign your own death warrant!” She paused—then passing the will to Old Man Toler, asked: “Will *you* read that will aloud, sir? I was abandoned and forgotten, I know

that—but my grandfather was a just man; and I want to know if he cut off my dear brother without a penny!”

“Jay Gallaway!” cried Kate, “be a man and tear that paper outen his hands!”

“See here, Toler,” mumbled Jason, “you hand that over here—the law doesn’t permit any such doin’s as ther forcible readin’ of private papers!”

But old Toler held the document behind him, replying: “Now, Gallaway, you’re not in a position ter appeal ter the law. This hull thing ’s irreg’lar. You’ve trusted ter the habit our people have of mindin’ only ther’ own business, but yer don’t s’pose that they haven’t had their thoughts ’bout Old Man Parsell that war a rich man when he war a livin’ Mormon, but war such a poor man arter he seceded and died?”

“Gol durn yer!” rumbled Gallaway, helplessly, while clear and plain Old Man Toler read aloud the will, and its generous provisions for all. A roar of wind shook the little house and the draught sent the flame flaring wildly in the lamp-chimney.

Mr. Gridley took a look at the document and muttered: “Never been probated—either mighty bold or mighty stupid. Huh-huh!—I see, all ready money and no real estate to transfer. Death of one heir sworn to—another defrauded by——”

“Stop!—please stop!” ’Twas Selina. With wild eyes she stared at her sister as if she had never seen her before; “Ingrate daughter! Judas sister! Liar!

Trickster! Thief! Inhuman monster! You—who held the helpless dead for money—probably already paid!”

A shriek, long and piercing, rose from Kate’s white lips. Selina turned toward her child. Another awful blast of wind made her pause—then she said: “May, get your hat.”

“Seliny! Selina!” cried Jason and Grandmother together. The child tied her little rough straw hat tight, and stood beside her mother—who stooped and drew the packed and still unopened bag toward her.

“Wait!” cried Old Man Toler, “till I take Gridley hum’, an’ I’ll com’ back for yer!”

“No!” answered the woman, “I cannot breathe the same air with this monster!”

“Whar’ be yer goin’?” he asked.

“I don’t know; come, May!”

“Selina!” quavered the old woman, “I was made to abandon you when you were helpless—but must you, oh, my dear, must you abandon me now, when I am helpless?”

“If God wills it—I’ll aid you yet, Mother—but I must go now!” she kissed the working old face, took her child by the hand and opened the door. The wind dashed her backward—slowly she recovered her footing.

“For God’s sake, stop her!” cried Jason. “It’s not ’er night for a dog ter be outside!”

“No honest dog would remain inside this house!”

she replied, and went out and closed the door. As she dropped the bag over the fence she heard the long piercing scream of Catharine Gallaway and, with curling lips, said: "More fits."

Then she stooped low to hear what May was shouting at her: "Mama, can't we go to the covered bridge out of the storm?"

"I don't know the way," said Selina.

"I do, Mama," replied the child, and so hand in hand bending before the blast, they struggled down the lonely road toward their only place of shelter, the old covered bridge.

CHAPTER XVII

The Wedding Dance

When 'Lonzo was well on his way toward the Brown place, he was surprised to see Nash Gallaway, "hoofin' it" to the dance. He explained that the horses were "so plumb tired haulin' all day that he jest couldn't make one of 'em tote him down to the bottom. He hadn't wanted to go anyway, but his mother thought it war a duty to encourage any straight out and out marryin' here on earth—seein' ther' wasn't any chance at all in the next world."

"But," said 'Lonzo, "it's so darn'd dark I can't see what yer packin' over your shoulder."

"Oh, them's my boots, 'Lonz—I've got my socks inside my hat. I ain't walkin' in my feet to save leather, only them peg soles hurt so when you first get back into 'em, that I go plumb crazy. So I'll wait till I hear the dogs fightin' and then I'll know I'm clost 'nough to set down and put 'em on."

He had leaned heavily against a tree as he spoke and 'Lonzo knew how tired he must be, so he said: "See here—of all human critters I'm the one I least like to drive alone with. So, Nash, you listen clost now—hitch them boots 'neath the sulky, then hop up

here and throw yer arm 'bout my slender waist and we'll each stretch out one leg and thrust the other under us to sit on and so as one man we can proudly drive to the shindig."

As they drove thus precariously balanced, Nash related the fact of Masker's return, and of his "biggoty manner."

"I saw him too," said 'Lonzo, "and he chucked me the cold shoulder—though Lord knows he used to chin fast enough when he war beatin' up trade. What the dickens do yer suppose he's back for anyhow? Cy Toler, Old Cy, I mean, says he acted like a man hidin' out, and I can't find where he put up that trotter of hissen. He's skulkin', that's sure, but what for 's what puzzles me."

He would have been still more puzzled could he have known that he had passed, drawn up in the wood just off the road, Masker, his buggy and his horse—the latter with bag-wrapped feet, that his stamping might not attract attention; and from that point he was watching eagerly as the wagons loaded with noisy young people crawled or jogged along the rough woods road, that was the shortest way to the "bottom" lands.

Now and then a horse passed carrying double—the woman behind with her dress and white skirts carefully covered with a shawl, and holding a small parcel or a box containing her bits of finery, such as a bow for the neck, an artificial flower or back comb for the

hair, perhaps even a sash—all to be adjusted after arrival.

Anxiously, frowningly, he waited. Would Mrs. Stanway stop Amabel at the last moment from coming to this frolic? Old Man Stanway would not have consented to it; but she did nearly as she liked with her mother, and as one of the uncounted Tolers, Haley by name, had offered her a chair in his wagon between his wife (35) and his mother (65), she had declared her going was perfectly proper and a mere neighborly bit of fun. That she wanted to dance to the music of one fiddle, just to see how it felt.

All this he had had directly from Sam Bowen, and he had cried: "*Ah, le bon Diable!*" And now he waited while the wind began to sigh heavily through the tree tops, inky black against the hurrying clouds—swaying tumultuously across the star-sown sky!

A desperate, reckless man was this Charles Masker—passion-driven—passion-vanquished! For these last few weeks he had worked, striven, almost prayed to conquer his love for Amabel Stanway—but it was like a fire in his blood—like a madness in his brain! He became moody, taciturn—this man who had laughed, always laughed at life! His days were torture—his nights, oh, those nights, dream-full! Always he saw her, supple, rosy, fragrant as a flower, and always she turned her heavy-lashed eyes toward that cursed boy, with the strangely familiar face! and he was often wakened

by his own cry of jealous anguish. He had the heart of a gross sensualist, but he could suffer, and he had come to the point at last where he could bear no more! Where for a trifle he could have killed her and himself, too! Suddenly he gave up the struggle—he laid his desperate, foolhardy plan, to make this wildly desired creature his!

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The new Mrs. Toler, much flustered by the honor of receiving Miss Stanway, was quite upset, when that

with the whole strength of her body, and Grandmother held out her trembling arms, as May reeled into them. Selina with a savage bound caught her sister with a grip of steel by both shoulders—but suddenly loosened her hold and clenching her hands hard upon her breast, gasped thickly: “Take her away!—quick!—*quick!* Let her condition save her!” and Jason drew Kate back into the shelter of his arms.

Then Selina turned and looked at the little face resting on the grandmother’s bosom. She pointed to the distinct outline of Kate’s hand, burning red, across white cheek and temple, and added hoarsely: “That mark will cost you more than has all the evil doing of your evil life!”

“Seliny! Seliny!” pleaded Jason.

She ignored him: “You have proclaimed my child a liar, Mrs. Gallaway—well, now let’s see what *you* are!” She sprang upon the stupefied Melissa and snatching the will, opened it out.

Kate screamed and tore fiercely at Jason’s restraining hands. With proud humility, Selina went on: “I have supported myself since I was eight, but—I—I can’t read writing. Mother, please read this will aloud!” The old woman shrank back in mortal terror, and Selina hastily added: “No, I won’t ask you to sign your own death warrant!” She paused—then passing the will to Old Man Toler, asked: “Will *you* read that will aloud, sir? I was abandoned and forgotten, I know

that—but my grandfather was a just man; and I want to know if he cut off my dear brother without a penny!”

“Jay Gallaway!” cried Kate, “be a man and tear that paper outen his hands!”

“See here, Toler,” mumbled Jason, “you hand that over here—the law doesn’t permit any such doin’s as ther forcible readin’ of private papers!”

But old Toler held the document behind him, replying: “Now, Gallaway, you’re not in a position ter appeal ter the law. This hull thing’s irreg’lar. You’ve trusted ter the habit our people have of mindin’ only ther’ own business, but yer don’t s’pose that they haven’t had their thoughts ’bout Old Man Parsell that war a rich man when he war a livin’ Mormon, but war such a poor man arter he seceded and died?”

“Gol durn yer!” rumbled Gallaway, helplessly, while clear and plain Old Man Toler read aloud the will, and its generous provisions for all. A roar of wind shook the little house and the draught sent the flame flaring wildly in the lamp-chimney.

Mr. Gridley took a look at the document and muttered: “Never been probated—either mighty bold or mighty stupid. Huh-huh!—I see, all ready money and no real estate to transfer. Death of one heir sworn to—another defrauded by——”

“Stop!—please stop!” ’Twas Selina. With wild eyes she stared at her sister as if she had never seen her before; “Ingrate daughter! Judas sister! Liar!

Trickster! Thief! Inhuman monster! You—who held the helpless dead for money—probably already paid!”

A shriek, long and piercing, rose from Kate’s white lips. Selina turned toward her child. Another awful blast of wind made her pause—then she said: “May, get your hat.”

“Seliny! Selina!” cried Jason and Grandmother together. The child tied her little rough straw hat tight, and stood beside her mother—who stooped and drew the packed and still unopened bag toward her.

“Wait!” cried Old Man Toler, “till I take Gridley hum’, an’ I’ll com’ back for yer!”

“No!” answered the woman, “I cannot breathe the same air with this monster!”

“Whar’ be yer goin’?” he asked.

“I don’t know; come, May!”

“Selina!” quavered the old woman, “I was made to abandon you when you were helpless—but must you, oh, my dear, must you abandon me now, when I am helpless?”

“If God wills it—I’ll aid you yet, Mother—but I must go now!” she kissed the working old face, took her child by the hand and opened the door. The wind dashed her backward—slowly she recovered her footing.

“For God’s sake, stop her!” cried Jason. “It’s not ’er night for a dog ter be outside!”

“No honest dog would remain inside this house!”

she replied, and went out and closed the door. As she dropped the bag over the fence she heard the long piercing scream of Catharine Gallaway and, with curling lips, said: "More fits."

Then she stooped low to hear what May was shouting at her: "Mama, can't we go to the covered bridge out of the storm?"

"I don't know the way," said Selina.

"I do, Mama," replied the child, and so hand in hand bending before the blast, they struggled down the lonely road toward their only place of shelter, the old covered bridge.

CHAPTER XVII

The Wedding Dance

When 'Lonzo was well on his way toward the Brown place, he was surprised to see Nash Gallaway, "hoofin' it" to the dance. He explained that the horses were "so plumb tired haulin' all day that he jest couldn't make one of 'em tote him down to the bottom. He hadn't wanted to go anyway, but his mother thought it war a duty to encourage any straight out and out marryin' here on earth—seein' ther' wasn't any chance at all in the next world."

"But," said 'Lonzo, "it's so darn'd dark I can't see what yer packin' over your shoulder."

"Oh, them's my boots, 'Lonz—I've got my socks inside my hat. I ain't walkin' in my feet to save leather, only them peg soles hurt so when you first get back into 'em, that I go plumb crazy. So I'll wait till I hear the dogs fightin' and then I'll know I'm clost 'nough to set down and put 'em on."

He had leaned heavily against a tree as he spoke and 'Lonzo knew how tired he must be, so he said: "See here—of all human critters I'm the one I least like to drive alone with. So, Nash, you listen clost now—hitch them boots 'neath the sulky, then hop up

here and throw yer arm 'bout my slender waist and we'll each stretch out one leg and thrust the other under us to sit on and so as one man we can proudly drive to the shindig."

As they drove thus precariously balanced, Nash related the fact of Masker's return, and of his "biggoty manner."

"I saw him too," said 'Lonzo, "and he chucked me the cold shoulder—though Lord knows he used to chin fast enough when he war beatin' up trade. What the dickens do yer suppose he's back for anyhow? Cy Toler, Old Cy, I mean, says he acted like a man hidin' out, and I can't find where he put up that trotter of hissen. He's skulkin', that's sure, but what for 's what puzzles me."

He would have been still more puzzled could he have known that he had passed, drawn up in the wood just off the road, Masker, his buggy and his horse—the latter with bag-wrapped feet, that his stamping might not attract attention; and from that point he was watching eagerly as the wagons loaded with noisy young people crawled or jogged along the rough woods road, that was the shortest way to the "bottom" lands.

Now and then a horse passed carrying double—the woman behind with her dress and white skirts carefully covered with a shawl, and holding a small parcel or a box containing her bits of finery, such as a bow for the neck, an artificial flower or back comb for the

hair, perhaps even a sash—all to be adjusted after arrival.

Anxiously, frowningly, he waited. Would Mrs. Stanway stop Amabel at the last moment from coming to this frolic? Old Man Stanway would not have consented to it; but she did nearly as she liked with her mother, and as one of the uncounted Tolers, Haley by name, had offered her a chair in his wagon between his wife (35) and his mother (65), she had declared her going was perfectly proper and a mere neighborly bit of fun. That she wanted to dance to the music of one fiddle, just to see how it felt.

All this he had had directly from Sam Bowen, and he had cried: "*Ah, le bon Diable!*" And now he waited while the wind began to sigh heavily through the tree tops, inky black against the hurrying clouds—swaying tunultuously across the star-sown sky!

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young lady presented her with a britannia tea-pot and a little table tea-caddy already filled. The girls present were inclined to scared and bashful silence, until Amabel brought out her box of jasmine blossoms, after their own manner of doing, and borrowing a hair-pin from one, and helping tie the sash of another, set them at ease.

Everything save the big bed in the corner, which held the wraps of the guests at one end and the babes of the same at the other, had been turned out of doors. One lamp burned on the mantel-shelf and many tallow candles in tin holders guttered and dripped about the log walls. Outside, loom, table, cradle, clock, spinning-wheel, chest, cupboard, lay darker darks, dim, uncertain, but leading to many a cropper.

Near one door two barrels stood, a board across them, and on that a chair; this was the grand music stand. Here presently the fiddler took his place, and "ros'nin' his bow" made his convulsing opening remarks, for no dance fiddler is considered worth his salt, who is not also a thorough clown! He played a few bars and called for people to "take ther places!"

But some hideous bashfulness held them motionless. At last Amabel tried to signal Dred, and 'Lonzo seeing her, suddenly flung himself in the breach, and just as a husky big Gallaway was wiping his palms preparatory to offering her his hand, he stepped up to Miss Stanway, asked the pleasure, and stupefied the company by giv-

ing her his arm, instead of dragging her bodily by the hand, as was the local custom.

The husky one seized the girl with bayadere stripes and long ear-drops. Dred led out the best dancer in the settlement, but who, unfortunately, had lost not only her first youth, but her front teeth, while the bride and groom made up the set.

And they saluted—and forwarded—and backed—and sides-the-samed—and ladies-changed—and “sash-shay’d”—and balanced all—and “dosey-doed”—and swung to places, at first obeying the shouted orders of the fiddler with strained and anxious faces, but later with boisterous enjoyment.

Over in the corner a few chairs and three-legged stools were crowded for the benefit of a group of old women, who smoked and commented upon the dancers, while various ancient hounds, whose fighting days were over, stretched dusty, tired bodies behind or beneath the chairs and sheltering linsey-woolsey skirts, and with much snoring, dream-growling and nervous twitching of tired muscles, slept strenuously.

There seemed to be a disposition on the part of some of the older men to crowd together at the doors to chew and talk crops, but 'Lonzo wouldn't have it: “Goll darn it,” he asked, “Is this here a weddin' blow-out or not? Yer can set on the fence and gas about crops any Sunday, but Essie and Cy don't count on marryin' but onct, so you mosey round now and hump your-

selves into the middle of the room and do yer plumb duty. Mis' Toler, jest you cast a lasso among them women and yank out a dancer or two. Some of us will keep their pipes a-goin', while they're dancin'! Come on now! That's right, Mis' Brown," as the old woman with Nash Gallaway took the place of head couple.

Two old dames laid down their pipes, came out of the corner, one holding in her breath while she fastened her bottom hook—the other moistened her hands and smoothed down her banded hair and was thankful she had worn her white petticoat; and almost before he knew it the fiddler had before him several couples running in age from seventy years to fifty-six. Ah, that was a dance that followed, but what to call it would have puzzled any master of ceremonies. Starting out as a simple "quadrille," it developed features of the "Lancers" and of the "Virginia Reel," indeed, it finally became evident that the fiddler, inspired by something he had drawn from a gray jug, was having fun by "calling off" every figure of every dance he believed they knew; and, as the dancers warmed to their work, the dust rose, the women straightened their bent backs, planted their hands on their hips and balanced and swung so violently they nearly flung themselves off their feet.

To see these stiff-legged, leaden-footed old couples dashing up the outside and tearing down the middle, was a fearful and wonderful sight. There was but one

slight mishap in the whole thing. When the line of men advanced to the line of women for a "*dos à dos*" they used more energy than judgment as to space and in consequence there were no less than three end-on collisions, but spectators picked up the fallen before you could have said "Scat!" and they swung to places in great shape. There could be no doubt about it; the old ones had made a hit that would be talked of for years to come, and it is only fair to admit that one man had his coat on right to the end of the last set.

Just who it was who first pronounced the word "*schottische*," it would be hard to say, but it thrilled the company to learn that Miss Stanway, the Brat and Gallaway's 'Lonzo, could all dance it. The fiddler looked dubious. He "partly knew the tune, but was not sure of the end of it." Thereupon 'Lonzo took the violin and played the music over several times, and the man, who had a quick ear, soon captured the final bars.

Meantime Amabel had tried to teach the bayadere-striped girl, who hopped with the stiff knees of a spirited young calf.

"Mith Amabel, how many of them thide stepths do you take afore you hop, pleath?" asked the toothless one. Amabel, lifting her dainty skirts, with feet in first position, took the long gliding side-steps, saying: "Right—one, two—back; left—one, two—then hop, hop, hop to fill the measure of the music." And the woman, who was a natural dancer, caught the idea with mar-

velous quickness, and was soon taking her long sliding steps in a manner that delighted Amabel.

A certain activity in the shed kitchen attracting his attention, 'Lonzo cried out: "See here now, you all hold yer hosses. This here 'shottish' is goin' to keep all right—and we'll just wait till the refreshments is passed, and after that yer can 'shottish' till yer past prayin' for!"

His remark had turned the attention of all hands toward the kitchen door, and the seated guests at once drew out handkerchiefs to spread over their laps—gentlemen stepped to the door and parted with their tobacco.

Dred brought in a bag of grain he found outside, and laying it down, offered it to Amabel for a seat. She accepted it with roguish dancing eyes, and presently shared it with a red-merino young woman, of a bouncing, blowzy, peony-like beauty, who gasped out: "Oh, it's jest too heavenly sweet of you'uns to com' down here and learn we'uns how to shottish! I won't be able to cat a bite—I'm so skeered of hoppin' in the wrong place!" which proved a grossly untruthful prophecy, as she ate and drank enough to have satisfied the needs of two workingmen.

That 'Lonzo had proved the unquestioned "buck dandy" of the dance was not all. The bridegroom swore that 'Lonz was Essie's right-bower, for he was

"al'ays ready to help her outen any fix," and right then she looked over distressfully.

'Lonzo rushed to the kitchen door, with his cheerful: "Wal', now, what's got a grip on yer, Mis' Toler?"

"Surely Old Mrs. Brown just was doing this thing 'plumb bang-up fine,' for if she hadn't made hot coffee for the 'old 'uns, and had pig's feet and bread special for them, while there was fried cakes and apples and cider and whisky and 'rum ber gosh!' for the heft of 'em—and now Essie wanted to know, 'If 'Lonzo would help her with the old folks,' and ask 'em whether they took long-sweetenin' or short-sweetenin' and com' and tell her?"

But 'Lonzo suggested: "Here, you pour out the coffee and I'll foller behind you with both sweetenin's, and they can trim up their coffee to their own taste."

Essie beamed as she admitted: "Oh, my, but you do beat all for sense! Miss Amabel's the beauty, and you're the regular king-pin of the hull affair!"

Presently the old women with shining eyes received their cups of steaming coffee and either "long-sweetenin'" (molasses), or "short-sweetenin'" (sugar), and young Cy, the bridegroom, with a pail of cider in which a gourd-dipper bobbed serenely, followed his mother-in-law, who carried a tin dish-pan, heaping full of fried cakes, from guest to guest.

Old Man Brown, with a chopping bowl piled high with choice apples, came last and the amazed family

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Old Man Brown, with a chopping bowl piled high with choice apples, came last and the amazed family

hair, perhaps even a sash—all to be adjusted after arrival.

Anxiously, frowningly, he waited. Would Mrs. Stanway stop Amabel at the last moment from coming to this frolic? Old Man Stanway would not have consented to it; but she did nearly as she liked with her mother, and as one of the uncounted Tolers, Haley by name, had offered her a chair in his wagon between his wife (35) and his mother (65), she had declared her going was perfectly proper and a mere neighborly bit of fun. That she wanted to dance to the music of one fiddle, just to see how it felt.

All this he had had directly from Sam Bowen, and he had cried: "*Ah, le bon Diable!*" And now he waited while the wind began to sigh heavily through the tree tops, inky black against the hurrying clouds—swaying tumultuously across the star-sown sky!

A desperate, reckless man was this Charles Masker—passion-driven—passion-vanquished! For these last few weeks he had worked, striven, almost prayed to conquer his love for Amabel Stanway—but it was like a fire in his blood—like a madness in his brain! He became moody, taciturn—this man who had laughed, always laughed at life! His days were torture—his nights, oh, those nights, dream-full! Always he saw her, supple, rosy, fragrant as a flower, and always she turned her heavy-lashed eyes toward that cursed boy, with the strangely familiar face! and he was often wakened

by his own cry of jealous anguish. He had the heart of a gross sensualist, but he could suffer, and he had come to the point at last where he could bear no more! Where for a trifle he could have killed her and himself, too! Suddenly he gave up the struggle—he laid his desperate, foolhardy plan, to make this wildly desired creature his!

He had had, too, ill news from his trusted agent in the East, who had lost sight of the only living thing that had been precious to him—so that but added to his desperation! He knew the temper of these people—if he lost this game, he stood to lose his life as well! But what of it—without the girl life was hell! The laugh came back to his lips; the devil is good to his own, he had said, and here he was now, waiting to see how far the saying would hold good!

All the day Amabel had tormented Dred, looking at him with gentle, even wistful eyes one moment, only to frown capriciously at him the next. He had hoped the Tolers would ask him to join their party—but they did not; and Amabel petulantly declared, to herself: “That Dred might have asked for a seat in the big wagon if they had not sense enough to offer it—and that he would have done so had he really cared to keep near her.”

So it happened that Dred, who, smiling in his very sleep, had wakened to blissful hopes on this wonderful birthday, and had received for his very own the “brown

old Keats," was yet flouted and cast down because when wishing to confess both a past shame and a hard-earned triumph over former ignorance, he had said: "There's something I wish to tell you, Amabel—will you hear me?"

She had rather curtly answered: "Had you not better confide in the blue-eyed widow?"

"Thank you," coolly responded the boy, "I have done so already," and he would have been amazed had he known how deep was the wound he had dealt to Amabel's vanity—when she was expecting protest and entreaty.

Dred, much cast down, determined not to go to Brown's at all, but Mrs. Stanway at once protested, declaring it was his duty to watch over Amabel in this foolish enterprise and to be on hand in case some unintentional roughness gave offence!

"Why Mother," laughed Amabel, "they are not aborigines! I believe you think they are going to wear feathers and paint and sacrifice a red dog! And yet you want me to wear a flounced-to-the-waist skirt, a real party-dress, gloves and all, to mortify the other girls and spoil all their fun."

So at last, when the skulking watcher in the wood felt rather than saw Amabel's presence in the lumbering wagon of Haley Toler, he noted with a frown that young Hollister followed mounted on Mr. Stanway's big roan gelding Chinkapin. They passed laughing

and chatting, bumping and tipping—but through it all Old Woman Toler smoked her cob-pipe unceasingly; while every now and then Dred sharply recalled Shot, who strove desperately to pick a fight with the old rack of bones running soberly under the Toler wagon.

At last a great barking of dogs—a pair of pumpkin lanterns stuck up on poles, told them they had reached the place of entertainment. Horses were hitched to trees, to fences; some were baiting at the tail end of wagons, filled with rush-bottom chairs and patchwork quilts that had served as lap-robcs for the women.

As Amabel entered the large living room, the bride was just laying her sleeping baby on the foot of the bed, with three other visiting babes who were already ensconced there. And a belligerent crowd they were, with wee drawn brows and doubled fists. Two old crones, holding their pipes aside that hot ashes might not fall on the small sleepers, “reckon’d that Essie’s was a mouty likely child!”

But ’Lonzo, pointing to another, remarked: ‘I’m puttin’ my money on that one with the red head, he’s goin’ to hurt somethin’ when he wakes up—which he looks like he’s tryin’ to do now.’”

“Wal’, the Lord forbid!” said Haley, “he’s my neffy, he is, and he can out holler anything in flannel this side of Jordan!”

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cat, returning from her nightly field hunt, paused in the doorway just long enough to pitch the old man heels over head, firing apples in every direction. For one horrible moment he lay across the knees of Amabel and the red-merino young woman, in an attitude only demanded of guilty youth by irate mothers.

"Quite a heavy windfall," said Dred, gravely, as having assisted the host he stooped to pick up apples.

"Windfall nothin'! windfall be cussed! 'twas that dam' cat that throwed me down!" and then they all roared with laughter and every young fellow, in picking up the fallen apples, felt it his bounden duty, as combined jester and beau, to grasp the toe of his fair one's shoe, mistaking it for an apple. Piercing shrieks of startled modesty naturally followed—sounds that brought upon the scene several stub-tailed, lowering-faced dogs, whose upraised bristles told how eagerly they waited an excuse for the free fight their souls longed for.

'Twas just about here that Gallaway's 'Lonzo really showed what a man can do when he feels himself the right man in the right place. Others there were, no doubt, who carried pocket-knives—but who made play with them as 'Lonzo did? He it was who cored and sliced thin apples for the toothless women. He it was who gouged out any doubtful spot for the men. He who pared apples for the girls without breaking the paring, so that they might go over by the bed and in

semi-privacy turn it three times around and above their heads and dropping it on the floor, say: "I spell my love with the letter so and so," naming the initial of the beloved. A disappointed "Pshaw!" told of failure, a delighted "Oh!" told that the apple-skin formed an E or a C or what-not. It was surprising what an appetite for fruit was developed after this accomplishment of 'Lonzo's was discovered.

Then the supper being over he cut many splinters from the log wall, sharpened them and presented them as tooth-picks to the ladies; and, finally, as the fiddler, following the habit of the harvester, who throws the jug to his shoulder and drinks from the neck, was passing the delectable corn juice on and making his own way toward his music stand—'Lonzo gallantly drew the ladies forward one by one and with his trusty blade scraped from their backs the candle tallow that had fallen and chilled in drops and streaks, remarking encouragingly to those with woolen backs: "Jest a little dab of chalk on there to-morrow and a paper and a warm 'flat' will take every hint of grease outen that back of yourn."

It is this ability to create tooth-picks where there were none—to gouge, core, peel adaptably for either old or young, to scrape the back of a lady in time of need quietly without fuss or flurry that places a man socially and makes him a leader almost in spite of himself!

Once more "shottish" was the cry. Dred, encouraged by certain glances, had ventured to ask the dance of Amabel, who had gladly promised it—the absence of the blue-eyed widow making her delightfully light of heart; and she was so proud of Dred: "Handsome young giant!" she thought, "and he so troubled because he had no best suit, and no time to get one. Yet in the old loose dark blue coat and trousers with blue silk handkerchief under his turned down white collar, the feet and the hands of the well-born, he looks among these people with whom he honestly counts himself, he looks—a gentleman!"

At last, with three couples on the floor, the "shottish" was on its way: "Wal', I vum!"—"Wal', I'm dog-gon'd!"—"It's like watchin' hopper-grasses to see 'em at that!" were some of the comments made.

Then there was a sound of kicking from the direction of the barn, and after a few more blissful hops with the radiant creature of his love, poor Dred was called. He excused himself to Amabel and hastened to the door.

"Chinkapin was cast or somethin' and wouldn't he come and see about it—for the horse would know his voice—and he seemed scared."

Away he rushed to the stable—again the dance was started, this time 'Lonzo temporarily with Amabel. And as they one-twoed, one-twoed, hop-hopped, a horse driven furiously came up the rough road.

Masker through the lighted window recognized the slender, swaying form of Amabel—with a delight so keen that his quick indrawn breath was like a gasp of pain!

The host of the evening went out, ordered away the baying dogs, who had pooled their issues in order to attack in force anything traveling under this buggy, but there was no dog there, and once more they slunk away in dejected disappointment.

"No," Masker said he would not alight: "Miss Stanway, he was sorry, but she would have to be told to get ready instantly to return home."

Several people had come outside—the roaring of the wind making it hard to catch the words he was speaking. Essie Toler began to cry and called loudly for her mother.

Mrs. Brown came and listened to Masker's hurried story of "Accident to Mrs. Stanway, who, in going to the cellar for something, had fallen and was—well, no one knew just how much she was hurt—but when she came to—(at those ominous words the women clasped their hands and rocked to and fro)—she had asked for Amabel."

Old Man Brown yelled for Haley Toler, and told him: "He'd have to harness up straight away and take Miss Stanway hum—as she had come with his folks." Masker tried hard to keep his voice steady, as he answered: "I could get her over the ground twice as

quick with this light rig of mine—don't you think, Mr. Brown?"

Just then one quick cry came from inside the house—the fiddling stopped in an instant. The girl in pale pink with the cluster of white jessamine at her breast and a half wreath of the same perfumed starry white blossoms in her cloudy hair stood motionless! her dark eyes wide with helpless pain! Then with the cry of "Mother! oh, Mother!" she sprang to the bed—began a wild search for her little pink-lined gray cloak. As she pulled it toward her its fringe passed over the face of one of the "belligerents"—who wailed loudly in consequence: "Oh, Baby!" cried the girl, "forgive me, I didn't mean to!" and she dashed out.

"Can't we start at once? Oh, where is the wagon? Who brought the news?"

'Lonzo, the most self-controlled of the lot, said: "Mr. Masker brought the news, and as he has a fast horse he thinks——"

"Why," broke in the girl, "did he not go for the doctor with his fast horse instead of coming first for useless me?"

The joy of hearing her voice again was almost ecstasy to the graceless man, who, steadily playing his game, lifted his hat and rapidly explained that he had sent Sam Bowen for the doctor before he, Masker, had left the house—where he had called to pay his respects.

Haley, knowing the jugs were only just beginning to circulate, moved so slowly no one was surprised when the frightened girl accepted Mr. Masker's escort. 'Lonzo looked sharply up at the man and suggested: "Hadn't Mis' Haley Toler better go along—you've got room enough there?"

"Yes!" cried Amabel.

"No!" sharply negatived Masker, muttering something about extra weight, gathered up the reins while 'Lonzo tucked in the pretty fluff of pink and white skirts. Then of a sudden she remembered: "Oh, Dred! where's Dred? Tell him—I am——"

An oath leaped from Masker's lips—with a cut from the whip, but one that failed of its purpose. For, instead of bolting forward, the horse stood nearly straight on end, pawing furiously at the air!

Amabel leaning out cried to 'Lonzo: "Tell him to come to Mother, quick!"

The horse darted away but the howling wind brought back the words: "Take the woods road!"

The jug circulated freely, the women cried a little and talked over the queerness of Masker's being back—and the evil effects of heavy falls upon middle-aged women.

Old Brown began to gather some of his outlying furniture into the shelter of a shed, warned less by the tearing wind and wildly flying clouds, than by the evident uneasiness of the horses.

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Two old dames laid down their pipes, came out of the corner, one holding in her breath while she fastened her bottom hook—the other moistened her hands and smoothed down her banded hair and was thankful she had worn her white petticoat; and almost before he knew it the fiddler had before him several couples running in age from seventy years to fifty-six. Ah, that was a dance that followed, but what to call it would have puzzled any master of ceremonies. Starting out as a simple "quadrille," it developed features of the "Lancers" and of the "Virginia Reel," indeed, it finally became evident that the fiddler, inspired by something he had drawn from a gray jug, was having fun by "calling off" every figure of every dance he believed they knew; and, as the dancers warmed to their work, the dust rose, the women straightened their bent backs, planted their hands on their hips and balanced and swung so violently they nearly flung themselves off their feet.

To see these stiff-legged, leaden-footed old couples dashing up the outside and tearing down the middle, was a fearful and wonderful sight. There was but one

slight mishap in the whole thing. When the line of men advanced to the line of women for a "*dos à dos*" they used more energy than judgment as to space and in consequence there were no less than three end-on collisions, but spectators picked up the fallen before you could have said "Scat!" and they swung to places in great shape. There could be no doubt about it; the old ones had made a hit that would be talked of for years to come, and it is only fair to admit that one man had his coat on right to the end of the last set.

Just who it was who first pronounced the word "*schottische*," it would be hard to say, but it thrilled the company to learn that Miss Stanway, the Brat and Gallaway's 'Lonzo, could all dance it. The fiddler looked dubious. He "partly knew the tune, but was not sure of the end of it." Thereupon 'Lonzo took the violin and played the music over several times, and the man, who had a quick ear, soon captured the final bars.

Meantime Amabel had tried to teach the bayadere-striped girl, who hopped with the stiff knees of a spirited young calf.

"Mith Amabel, how many of them thide stepths do you take afore you hop, pleath?" asked the toothless one. Amabel, lifting her dainty skirts, with feet in first position, took the long gliding side-steps, saying: "Right—one, two—back; left—one, two—then hop, hop, hop to fill the measure of the music." And the woman, who was a natural dancer, caught the idea with mar-

velous quickness, and was soon taking her long sliding steps in a manner that delighted Amabel.

A certain activity in the shed kitchen attracting his attention, 'Lonzo cried out: "See here now, you all hold yer hosses. This here 'shottish' is goin' to keep all right—and we'll just wait till the refreshments is passed, and after that yer can 'shottish' till yer past prayin' for!"

His remark had turned the attention of all hands toward the kitchen door, and the seated guests at once drew out handkerchiefs to spread over their laps—gentlemen stepped to the door and parted with their tobacco.

Dred brought in a bag of grain he found outside, and laying it down, offered it to Amabel for a seat. She accepted it with roguish dancing eyes, and presently shared it with a red-merino young woman, of a bouncing, blowzy, peony-like beauty, who gasped out: "Oh, it's jest too heavenly sweet of you'uns to com' down here and learn we'uns how to shottish! I won't be able to eat a bite—I'm so skeered of hoppin' in the wrong place!" which proved a grossly untruthful prophecy, as she ate and drank enough to have satisfied the needs of two workingmen.

That 'Lonzo had proved the unquestioned "buck dandy" of the dance was not all. The bridegroom swore that 'Lonz was Essie's right-bower, for he was

"al'ays ready to help her outen any fix," and right then she looked over distressfully.

'Lonzo rushed to the kitchen door, with his cheerful: "Wal', now, what's got a grip on yer, Mis' Toler?"

"Surely Old Mrs. Brown just was doing this thing 'plumb bang-up fine,' for if she hadn't made hot coffee for the 'old 'uns, and had pig's feet and bread special for them, while there was fried cakes and apples and cider and whisky and 'rum ber gosh!' for the heft of 'em—and now Essie wanted to know, 'If 'Lonzo would help her with the old folks,' and ask 'em whether they took long-sweetenin' or short-sweetenin' and com' and tell her?"

But 'Lonzo suggested: "Here, you pour out the coffee and I'll foller behind you with both sweetenin's, and they can trim up their coffee to their own taste."

Essie beamed as she admitted: "Oh, my, but you do beat all for sense! Miss Amabel's the beauty, and you're the regular king-pin of the hull affair!"

Presently the old women with shining eyes received their cups of steaming coffee and either "long-sweetenin' " (molasses), or "short-sweetenin' " (sugar), and young Cy, the bridegroom, with a pail of cider in which a gourd-dipper bobbed serenely, followed his mother-in-law, who carried a tin dish-pan, heaping full of fried cakes, from guest to guest.

Old Man Brown, with a chopping bowl piled high with choice apples, came last and the amazed family

cat, returning from her nightly field hunt, paused in the doorway just long enough to pitch the old man heels over head, firing apples in every direction. For one horrible moment he lay across the knees of Amabe and the red-merino young woman, in an attitude only demanded of guilty youth by irate mothers.

"Quite a heavy windfall," said Dred, gravely, a having assisted the host he stooped to pick up apples.

"Windfall nothin'! windfall be cussed! 'twas the dam' cat that throwed me down!" and then they all roared with laughter and every young fellow, in picking up the fallen apples, felt it his bounden duty, a combined jester and beau, to grasp the toe of his fair one's shoe, mistaking it for an apple. Piercing shriek of startled modesty naturally followed—sounds that brought upon the scene several stub-tailed, lowering faced dogs, whose upraised bristles told how eagerly they waited an excuse for the free fight their soul longed for.

'Twas just about here that Gallaway's 'Lonzo really showed what a man can do when he feels himself the right man in the right place. Others there were, no doubt, who carried pocket-knives—but who made play with them as 'Lonzo did? He it was who cored and sliced thin apples for the toothless women. He it was who gouged out any doubtful spot for the men. He who pared apples for the girls without breaking the paring, so that they might go over by the bed and in

semi-privacy turn it three times around and above their heads and dropping it on the floor, say: "I spell my love with the letter so and so," naming the initial of the beloved. A disappointed "Pshaw!" told of failure, a delighted "Oh!" told that the apple-skin formed an E or a C or what-not. It was surprising what an appetite for fruit was developed after this accomplishment of 'Lonzo's was discovered.

Then the supper being over he cut many splinters from the log wall, sharpened them and presented them as tooth-picks to the ladies; and, finally, as the fiddler, following the habit of the harvester, who throws the jug to his shoulder and drinks from the neck, was passing the delectable corn juice on and making his own way toward his music stand—'Lonzo gallantly drew the ladies forward one by one and with his trusty blade scraped from their backs the candle tallow that had fallen and chilled in drops and streaks, remarking encouragingly to those with woolen backs: "Jest a little dab of chalk on there to-morrow and a paper and a warm 'flat' will take every hint of grease outen that back of yourn."

It is this ability to create tooth-picks where there were none—to gouge, core, peel adaptably for either old or young, to scrape the back of a lady in time of need quietly without fuss or flurry that places a man socially and makes him a leader almost in spite of himself!

Once more "shottish" was the cry. Dred, encouraged by certain glances, had ventured to ask the dance of Amabel, who had gladly promised it—the absence of the blue-eyed widow making her delightfully light of heart; and she was so proud of Dred: "Handsome young giant!" she thought, "and he so troubled because he had no best suit, and no time to get one. Yet in the old loose dark blue coat and trousers with blue silk handkerchief under his turned down white collar, the feet and the hands of the well-born, he looks among these people with whom he honestly counts himself, he looks—a gentleman!"

At last, with three couples on the floor, the "shottish" was on its way: "Wal', I vum!"—"Wal', I'm doggon'd!"—"It's like watchin' hopper-grasses to see 'em at that!" were some of the comments made.

Then there was a sound of kicking from the direction of the barn, and after a few more blissful hops with the radiant creature of his love, poor Dred was called. He excused himself to Amabel and hastened to the door.

"Chinkapin was cast or somethin' and wouldn't he come and see about it—for the horse would know his voice—and he seemed scared."

Away he rushed to the stable—again the dance was started, this time 'Lonzo temporarily with Amabel. And as they one-twoed, one-twoed, hop-hopped, a horse driven furiously came up the rough road.

Masker through the lighted window recognized the slender, swaying form of Amabel—with a delight so keen that his quick indrawn breath was like a gasp of pain!

The host of the evening went out, ordered away the baying dogs, who had pooled their issues in order to attack in force anything traveling under this buggy, but there was no dog there, and once more they slunk away in dejected disappointment.

"No," Masker said he would not alight: "Miss Stanway, he was sorry, but she would have to be told to get ready instantly to return home."

Several people had come outside—the roaring of the wind making it hard to catch the words he was speaking. Essie Toler began to cry and called loudly for her mother.

Mrs. Brown came and listened to Masker's hurried story of "Accident to Mrs. Stanway, who, in going to the cellar for something, had fallen and was—well, no one knew just how much she was hurt—but when she came to—(at those ominous words the women clasped their hands and rocked to and fro)—she had asked for Amabel."

Old Man Brown yelled for Haley Toler, and told him: "He'd have to harness up straight away and take Miss Stanway hum—as she had come with his folks." Masker tried hard to keep his voice steady, as he answered: "I could get her over the ground twice as

quick with this light rig of mine—don't you think, Mr. Brown?"

Just then one quick cry came from inside the house—the fiddling stopped in an instant. The girl in pale pink with the cluster of white jessamine at her breast and a half wreath of the same perfumed starry white blossoms in her cloudy hair stood motionless! her dark eyes wide with helpless pain! Then with the cry of "Mother! oh, Mother!" she sprang to the bed—began a wild search for her little pink-lined gray cloak. As she pulled it toward her its fringe passed over the face of one of the "belligerents"—who wailed loudly in consequence: "Oh, Baby!" cried the girl, "forgive me, I didn't mean to!" and she dashed out.

"Can't we start at once? Oh, where is the wagon? Who brought the news?"

'Lonzo, the most self-controlled of the lot, said: "Mr. Masker brought the news, and as he has a fast horse he thinks——"

"Why," broke in the girl, "did he not go for the doctor with his fast horse instead of coming first for useless me?"

The joy of hearing her voice again was almost ecstasy to the graceless man, who, steadily playing his game, lifted his hat and rapidly explained that he had sent Sam Bowen for the doctor before he, Masker, had left the house—where he had called to pay his respects.

Haley, knowing the jugs were only just beginning to circulate, moved so slowly no one was surprised when the frightened girl accepted Mr. Masker's escort. 'Lonzo looked sharply up at the man and suggested: "Hadn't Mis' Haley Toler better go along—you've got room enough there?"

"Yes!" cried Amabel.

"No!" sharply negatived Masker, muttering something about extra weight, gathered up the reins while 'Lonzo tucked in the pretty fluff of pink and white skirts. Then of a sudden she remembered: "Oh, Dred! where's Dred? Tell him—I am——"

An oath leaped from Masker's lips—with a cut from the whip, but one that failed of its purpose. For, instead of bolting forward, the horse stood nearly straight on end, pawing furiously at the air!

Amabel leaning out cried to 'Lonzo: "Tell him to come to Mother, quick!"

The horse darted away but the howling wind brought back the words: "Take the woods road!"

The jug circulated freely, the women cried a little and talked over the queerness of Masker's being back—and the evil effects of heavy falls upon middle-aged women.

Old Brown began to gather some of his outlying furniture into the shelter of a shed, warned less by the tearing wind and wildly flying clouds, than by the evident uneasiness of the horses.

Then Dred came in—announcing cheerily that Chinkapin was all right now, and he was ready for “shottish,” “money-musk,” or “reel” and—why—where was Miss Stanway?

As the story was told 'Lonzo noted the black frown that followed Masker's name, but when he heard that Mrs. Stanway had fallen in going to the cellar, “I'll swear,” 'Lonzo used to say, “Huldy's Brat must hav' jumped a foot. He turned white as plaster and just under his breath, he said: ‘Oh, damn him! damn him!’ Then he turned and says, ‘And not one of you women went along with that poor frightened girl; give me a lantern, somebody,’ and before you could bat yer eyes, he was into that barn flinging a saddle on to the roan and himself into the saddle, and I was yellin' at him. They were goin' by the woods road. She said so, so that much is square, and at that the Brat looked into my eyes and we each knew the other had suspicions.”

Piloted by Shot, Chinkapin and Dred started homeward and the latter muttered over and over: “She fell on the cellar steps? Yet, because there is much liquor there and she feared the men might make excuses to ask for some when I had gone, she had the cellar locked and gave me the key to carry with me—(he pressed his hand to his pocket). Yet Mrs. Stanway is hurt by a fall on the cellar stairs! Ah, Amabel, my beloved! Why did you not send or call for me? Why are you alone with that man—who always laughs, and

has the eyes of a beast? Why? Yet—(excusingly)—poor frightened, trusting little soul! what else could you do but take the quickest way to your mother's side? God, what a gale! I hope you are safe from everything, my darling!" and he pressed the roan on to a quicker gallop!

As they had driven away in the wild night, Masker had sat silent in an absolute rapture, every tiniest nerve in his body thrilling individually at the warmth of her nearness. The jessamine perfume breathing from her breast and hair stole into his brain and touched his imagination as hasheesh might. They reached the woods and now and then, cloud-curtained, a waning moon peered forth and sent silvery showers dripping through the tossing boughs, to pool in grassy places. Then darkness again, with the hollow-sounding wind about them and the big bay devouring space with his great flinging open stride.

"Having this to gamble for, shall I suffer again the tortures of these last few days? *Pas si bête!*"

In a sudden flood of pearly light he saw his mad desire embodied at his side—saw the soft confusion of draperies, the wind-loosened hair, the beautiful up-curved lashes now clinging black against her cheek—innocently voluptuous; unconsciously seductive.

She was the last, the fiercest passion of his life. His longing overmastered him—he broke into speech.

Amabel, with hands clasped in her lap, striving to be

very quiet, thought only: "How long, oh, how long, before I can reach my mother who calls for me?" She had no thought—had felt no fear of the reckless speed of Masker's driving. She was straining forward mentally toward that injured mother! And the man with vulpine eyes was speaking rapidly, brokenly, telling an old, old story; and, practice making perfect, he delivered it with fiery fluency, verve, and seeming freshness.

Wrapped in her own thoughts the girl heard his rapid words, without catching their meaning, but there was a vibration in them that shook her nerves. In his eyes she saw blazing fire that seemed to burn—to—to shame her! He leaned closer—his breath was hot upon her cheek.

"Come! you will come to me and be mine! *L'idole! l'idole!*"

Her face was white, cold, rigid as are the faces of the dead. Only in the eyes—the living eyes; a great horror was growing. She shrank back—back—back, still further back till she was in real danger.

"Take care, my angel," he cried, and threw an arm about her to draw her into safety. The contact set his blood aflame, his brain went whirling like a top.

"Kiss me!" he pleaded, hoarsely. "Once, my sweet! just once!"

"Let me go!" she gasped, holding herself rigidly away.

"Kiss me!" his face was crimson, hideous! She felt increasing pressure in his arm, then he whispered triumphantly, '*You shall!*' "

She dashed her clenched hand in his face, and he laughed. "You beast," the girl ground out between her teeth—and reaching over his shoulder she caught the whip and struck at the horse.

The blow was ineffectual—Masker had no runaway on his hands. But the devil of mad passion was unchained! He forgot—everything there was to forget! Holding the reins down with his foot he seized her by the wrists—then crushed her to his breast!

A long, long, heaven-piercing shriek rang through the lonely wood. Then a man's voice roared: "*Prenez garde!* for God's sake, don't jump!"

A flash of white garments through the air—a blow struck with a fluttering cloak on the side of a nervous horse—the clatter of a wildly running animal—the plunging of a slender body through the underbrush—and then—the wind—the snapping, and the cracking of the straining boughs and branches everywhere!

CHAPTER XVIII

Left in Charge

As that awful cry rose skyward the furious wind caught and tore it into shreds—but even so, the lonely rider through the wood felt his blood chill, and with an oath dashed his spurless heels into the big roan's sides and was pounding recklessly along when he thought he heard a faint cry! Chinkapin shied with a side bound that nearly unseated him. Something white slipped through the undergrowth. Then with thorn-torn garments and fallen hair, a piteous figure reeled into the road, and holding out beseeching little hands fell against the horse's shoulder for support.

"Great God!" he gasped—then: "Where 's he?" His far-roving eye returned to find her face close hidden on the horse's neck and dimly—he understood.

Growing ghastly, he looked at that bowed head. She had been humiliated—shamed. Her perfect purity had somehow been blurred. His strong jaw squared and set like a trap of steel. "Come," he said.

She raised dazed dark eyes, for one look—then obediently placed a hand in his, set her left foot upon his extended stirrured one, and was swung up behind him. Her hooded cloak was gone. He removed his

neck handkerchief and turning half about, tied it on her head peasant fashion. She slipped her arm about him for support and rested her aching head against the flat young back before her as in dead silence they took up the now slow homeward journey, as Chinkapin carried double.

Beneath the savage hatred that was growing in cold intensity every moment, Dred was conscious of a tremulous rapture of delight that rose like a tide in his veins. Her instinctive reliance upon him made his love more reverent than ever. Glancing down upon the little hand clinging to his coat, he thought, it looked so small, so pitifully helpless, he longed to cover it with kisses—but he would not take advantage of her dependent position, as had that other.

So they rode in cold silence and the girl moaned to herself: "Mother; Oh, Mother! why did I not obey you! He has never cared much—and now he will despise me!" So near they were and yet so far!

After all the tremendous blow the rain had been a mere twenty-minute affair, that would have been laughable had not the wind done so much damage. The eastern sky was growing pale when a very tired Chinkapin was led away to his stall. "Strange," thought Amabel, "Dred, who is always so kind, so thoughtful, has said not a word about Mama, and attends first of all to the horse!"

Then stood, thunderstruck, for her mother, with a

loose wrapper over her night-dress, was coming into the living-room, asking, with petulant anxiety: "What were you two riding double for? I'm surprised at Eldred. Did anything happen to the Tolers? How late you are. Ellen has coffee ready in the kitchen and don't fail to drink a cup before you even think of changing those things. Why, Amabel Le Noir Stanway, what have you done to your clothes?" And breath failing her momentarily, Amabel asked, dazedly: "Have you seen Mr. Masker, Mother?"

"Mr. Masker? I have not seen Mr. Masker, nor do I expect to see him—nor yet do I wish to see him. His manners, my dear, are utterly superficial. Mercy, how my head aches. I told Ellen to prepare breakfast for us all, at once, since it's so near the men's hour. But if you'll excuse me, I'll take my coffee standing and go to bed and try to sleep now, as I've waited up all the night for a very spoiled daughter. Something to tell me? Oh, by and bye, Dear. Very important. My dear child, all your affairs are very important, to yourself. There, kiss me, dearie. Now change and have breakfast—and I'll listen to everything this afternoon. You see a good nap will prepare me to be properly astonished, my little belle, by your confidences;" and she retreated to her room and with a laugh locked the door.

For a full minute the girl must have stood staring there, her lips quivering with pain. She was so young

she felt so thrown back upon herself. Her mother had refused to accept her confidence, kindly, oh, yes kindly, but she had treated her like a child still playing with her dolls. Why did her mother make so light of her? Surely she might have seen that something was seriously wrong this morning! Her father would have noticed in a moment! At that thought she cried aloud: "Oh, my father! if you were here!" and struck her hands together in swift passion!

In this girl the arrogance, the stiff-necked family pride of the Le Noirs, mingled with the swift, fierce temper of the mountaineer, who makes a God of his personal honor! Ardent, tender, generous, loyal, these qualities, like shimmering veils, helped to hide or softened that temper vehement, impetuous, that pride almost savage! Now as she fully realized how she had been tricked and deceived—understood the ruse by which the base wretch Masker had drawn her from her friends, to cruelly wring her heart with anguish for her mother's supposed suffering—rage, rage unspeakable possessed her! She saw herself a sort of by-word to the country-side; an object of curiosity, the girl who had been fooled! She, who always held herself slightly, but very distinctly aloof, as superior by birth and breeding! Oh, her pride bled at every pore! And he, that monster! who—who had laughed! was he to pass on his way free? to make a mock of her? Passion-choked, she gasped for breath!

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The servant passed to place the breakfast on the table. Amabel's decision was made in an instant! She dashed into her room! Casting her soiled, damp garments from her she made the simplest of toilets—listening all the time for approaching steps: "Mother would not hear me," she said; "well, perhaps Dred will!" With her dark wavy hair coiled low on her neck, and wrapped in the open white morning dress that was the fashion of the period, she looked an appealing young figure to Dred's eyes, as she motioned him not to rise at her entrance.

The dawn was so dim, Ellen had left the lighted candle still on the table. Amabel poured for herself a cup of coffee and drank it. Then she rose and slowly walked around the table and, stopping near him, said gently: "Dred, you asked me to hear you and I was unkind—that was yesterday, this is to-day, and now I have come to ask if you will hear me?"

He kept his eyes fixed on his plate: "Yes," he answered, "go on!"

"In the first place I must blame my heedlessness for part of what has happened. I should not have taken any action without consulting you—I see that now; but I was so frightened, Dred—and—and I was there against Mama's will, and I could not dream the man was lying about her suffering—so I trusted him!"

"Don't!" he interrupted, "there is no blame on you—there can be none!"

"Oh, you are good!" she cried, gratefully, and then she began to tell him of that awful ride—of Masker's declaration of love—of his prayers for her to go away with him then and there—of pleadings turning to threats—of threats turning to boastings of his power! Told of her horror—her demand for freedom—her threat to jump—and all the time she spoke, Dred prepared with exact nicety food he never tasted—splitting corn-bread, buttering it delicately, cutting it with careful precision into four equal parts. Then, giving equally precise attention to his coffee, his self-control seemed to depend utterly upon this occupation of his hands—but the strained white face might have been that of a man clinging to a life-line, so set the jaw, so dilated the white-edged nostril!

She told slowly, with difficulty, almost under her breath, of the demanded kiss—her attempt to create a runaway—of the blow she had dashed into the hideous face—and of his laughter!

Dred's unconsciously gripped hand bent a Stanway spoon, bowl and handle together and dropped it.

"Then," continued the low voice at his side, "before I could—throw myself out—he—I—he—" the voice trailed faintly off into agonizing silence.

Slowly Dred's steely eyes turned to her, and lines seemed to grow in his smooth young face while he looked—for it is an awful thing for a man to see the face of a beloved woman flooded with the dye of

shame! To know that the purity he has truly revered has been recklessly assailed by brutal passion! As he looked he saw the fluttering pulse at her throat—saw her lips open and close helplessly. “He—he—” she gasped and then suddenly, with a passionate gesture, she threw back her sleeves and held out two slender arms. “Look!” she said.

Such piteous arms, all bruised, circled and blotched with blackened marks, while instinctively one hand flew to her cheek. A hoarse, wordless cry broke from Dred’s throat as he stared—then he turned, lifted the coffee and drained the cup—while Amabel, pulling down her sleeves over the bruises, cried fiercely: “All this—and my father is not here!”

Dred rose as he answered: “No—but he has left me in charge!” and slowly crossing the room, he took down the loaded gun hanging above the mantel, and dropping it into the cradle of his left arm, stood and looked long at Amabel, with the eyes of a thirsty man looking at water. Very low, he asked: “Will you kiss me, Amabel?” But before she could move he negatived his own request, with a gesture: “No!” he said, curtly, “not now—if I return, perhaps!”

As he left the house Amabel stooped and puffed out the lighted candle.

CHAPTER XIX

Who Breaks—Pays

As Eldred stepped outside, the sun cast its first golden spear of light level across the close-shorn fields. The early morning chill was still in the air. The crows flapped their way heavily toward the woods, caw-cawing hoarsely as they went. One instant he paused, looking at the slowly flushing sky. At the first moment of his grim decision, he had acted solely as the worthy steward of a trusting master—but now a fierce joy surged up within him—the die was cast, his life for her! Swiftly his memory recalled the warnings, the dire teachings of his mother! But he smiled and whispered triumphantly: “My soul to avenge an insult to my beloved!” For she was the first passion of his life and to a man of his mettle she might well remain the last!

He turned and went forward in his search for the creature who had lost his claim to manhood in attacking a defenseless girl!

Down in a dim and dusty corner of the old covered bridge, Selina Marsh sat on the string-piece, watching with tired eyes May’s little body curled up in sleep; her head resting on the old carpet bag which had been opened in the darkness and a small worsted shawl and

very quiet, thought only: "How long, oh, how long, before I can reach my mother who calls for me?" She had no thought—had felt no fear of the reckless speed of Masker's driving. She was straining forward mentally toward that injured mother! And the man with vulpine eyes was speaking rapidly, brokenly, telling an old, old story; and, practice making perfect, he delivered it with fiery fluency, verve, and seeming freshness.

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"Take care, my angel," he cried, and threw an arm about her to draw her into safety. The contact set his blood aflame, his brain went whirling like a top.

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A flash of white garments through the air—a blow struck with a fluttering cloak on the side of a nervous horse—the clatter of a wildly running animal—the plunging of a slender body through the underbrush—and then—the wind—the snapping, and the cracking of the straining boughs and branches everywhere!

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She raised dazed dark eyes, for one look—then obediently placed a hand in his, set her left foot upon his extended stirrured one, and was swung up behind him. Her hooded cloak was gone. He removed his

neck handkerchief and turning half about, tied it on her head peasant fashion. She slipped her arm about him for support and rested her aching head against the flat young back before her as in dead silence they took up the now slow homeward journey, as Chinkapin carried double.

Beneath the savage hatred that was growing in cold intensity every moment, Dred was conscious of a tremulous rapture of delight that rose like a tide in his veins. Her instinctive reliance upon him made his love more reverent than ever. Glancing down upon the little hand clinging to his coat, he thought, it looked so small, so pitifully helpless, he longed to cover it with kisses—but he would not take advantage of her dependent position, as had that other.

So they rode in cold silence and the girl moaned to herself: "Mother; Oh, Mother! why did I not obey you! He has never cared much—and now he will despise me!" So near they were and yet so far!

After all the tremendous blow the rain had been a mere twenty-minute affair, that would have been laughable had not the wind done so much damage. The eastern sky was growing pale when a very tired Chinkapin was led away to his stall. "Strange," thought Amabel, "Dred, who is always so kind, so thoughtful, has said not a word about Mama, and attends first of all to the horse!"

Then stood, thunderstruck, for her mother, with a

loose wrapper over her night-dress, was coming into the living-room, asking, with petulant anxiety: "What were you two riding double for? I'm surprised at Eldred. Did anything happen to the Tolers? How late you are. Ellen has coffee ready in the kitchen and don't fail to drink a cup before you even think of changing those things. Why, Amabel Le Noir Stanway! what have you done to your clothes?" And breath failing her momentarily, Amabel asked, dazedly: "Have you seen Mr. Masker, Mother?"

"Mr. Masker? I have not seen Mr. Masker, nor do I expect to see him—nor yet do I wish to see him. His manners, my dear, are utterly superficial. Mercy, how my head aches. I told Ellen to prepare breakfast for us all, at once, since it's so near the men's hour. But if you'll excuse me, I'll take my coffee standing, and go to bed and try to sleep now, as I've waited up all the night for a very spoiled daughter. Something to tell me? Oh, by and bye, Dear. Very important? My dear child, all your affairs are very important, to yourself. There, kiss me, dearie. Now change and breakfast—and I'll listen to everything this afternoon. You see a good nap will prepare me to be properly astonished, my little belle, by your confidences;" so she retreated to her room and with a laugh locked the door.

For a full minute the girl must have stood staring there, her lips quivering with pain. She was so young;

she felt so thrown back upon herself. Her mother had refused to accept her confidence, kindly, oh, yes kindly, but she had treated her like a child still playing with her dolls. Why did her mother make so light of her? Surely she might have seen that something was seriously wrong this morning! Her father would have noticed in a moment! At that thought she cried aloud: "Oh, my father! if you were here!" and struck her hands together in swift passion!

In this girl the arrogance, the stiff-necked family pride of the Le Noirs, mingled with the swift, fierce temper of the mountaineer, who makes a God of his personal honor! Ardent, tender, generous, loyal, these qualities, like shimmering veils, helped to hide or softened that temper vehement, impetuous, that pride almost savage! Now as she fully realized how she had been tricked and deceived—understood the ruse by which the base wretch Masker had drawn her from her friends, to cruelly wring her heart with anguish for her mother's supposed suffering—rage, rage unspeakable possessed her! She saw herself a sort of by-word to the country-side; an object of curiosity, the girl who had been fooled! She, who always held herself slightly, but very distinctly aloof, as superior by birth and breeding! Oh, her pride bled at every pore! And he, that monster! who—who had laughed! was he to pass on his way free? to make a mock of her? Passion-choked, she gasped for breath!

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The servant passed to place the breakfast on the table. Amabel's decision was made in an instant! She dashed into her room! Casting her soiled, damp garments from her she made the simplest of toilets—listening all the time for approaching steps: "Mother would not hear me," she said; "well, perhaps Dred will!" With her dark wavy hair coiled low on her neck, and wrapped in the open white morning dress that was the fashion of the period, she looked an appealing young figure to Dred's eyes, as she motioned him not to rise at her entrance.

The dawn was so dim, Ellen had left the lighted candle still on the table. Amabel poured for herself a cup of coffee and drank it. Then she rose and slowly walked around the table and, stopping near him, said gently: "Dred, you asked me to hear you and I was unkind—that was yesterday, this is to-day, and now I have come to ask if you will hear me?"

He kept his eyes fixed on his plate: "Yes," he answered, "go on!"

"In the first place I must blame my heedlessness for part of what has happened. I should not have taken any action without consulting you—I see that now; but I was so frightened, Dred—and—and I was there against Mama's will, and I could not dream the man was lying about her suffering—so I trusted him!"

"Don't!" he interrupted, "there is no blame on you—there can be none!"

"Oh, you are good!" she cried, gratefully, and then she began to tell him of that awful ride—of Masker's declaration of love—of his prayers for her to go away with him then and there—of pleadings turning to threats—of threats turning to boastings of his power! Told of her horror—her demand for freedom—her threat to jump—and all the time she spoke, Dred prepared with exact nicety food he never tasted—splitting corn-bread, buttering it delicately, cutting it with careful precision into four equal parts. Then, giving equally precise attention to his coffee, his self-control seemed to depend utterly upon this occupation of his hands—but the strained white face might have been that of a man clinging to a life-line, so set the jaw, so dilated the white-edged nostril!

She told slowly, with difficulty, almost under her breath, of the demanded kiss—her attempt to create a runaway—of the blow she had dashed into the hideous face—and of his laughter!

Dred's unconsciously gripped hand bent a Stanway spoon, bowl and handle together and dropped it.

"Then," continued the low voice at his side, "before I could—throw myself out—he—I—he—" the voice trailed faintly off into agonizing silence.

Slowly Dred's steely eyes turned to her, and lines seemed to grow in his smooth young face while he looked—for it is an awful thing for a man to see the face of a beloved woman flooded with the dye of

shame! To know that the purity he has truly revered has been recklessly assailed by brutal passion! As he looked he saw the fluttering pulse at her throat—saw her lips open and close helplessly. “He—he—she gasped and then suddenly, with a passionate gesture, she threw back her sleeves and held out two slender arms. “Look!” she said.

Such piteous arms, all bruised, circled and blotched with blackened marks, while instinctively one hand flew to her cheek. A hoarse, wordless cry broke from Dred’s throat as he stared—then he turned, lifted the coffee and drained the cup—while Amabel, pulling down her sleeves over the bruises, cried fiercely: “*Look at this—and my father is not here!*”

Dred rose as he answered: “No—but he has left me in charge!” and slowly crossing the room, he took down the loaded gun hanging above the mantel and dropping it into the cradle of his left arm, stood and looked long at Amabel, with the eyes of a thirsty man looking at water. Very low, he asked: “Will you kiss me, Amabel?” But before she could move he negatived his own request, with a gesture: “No!” he said curtly, “not now—if I return, perhaps!”

As he left the house Amabel stooped and puffed out the lighted candle.

CHAPTER XIX

Who Breaks—Pays

As Eldred stepped outside, the sun cast its first golden spear of light level across the close-shorn fields. The early morning chill was still in the air. The crows flapped their way heavily toward the woods, caw-cawing hoarsely as they went. One instant he paused, looking at the slowly flushing sky. At the first moment of his grim decision, he had acted solely as the worthy steward of a trusting master—but now a fierce joy surged up within him—the die was cast, his life for her! Swiftly his memory recalled the warnings, the dire teachings of his mother! But he smiled and whispered triumphantly: “My soul to avenge an insult to my beloved!” For she was the first passion of his life and to a man of his mettle she might well remain the last!

He turned and went forward in his search for the creature who had lost his claim to manhood in attacking a defenseless girl!

Down in a dim and dusty corner of the old covered bridge, Selina Marsh sat on the string-piece, watching with tired eyes May’s little body curled up in sleep; her head resting on the old carpet bag which had been opened in the darkness and a small worsted shawl and

the revolver drawn out. The shawl was wrapped about the little one's shoulders—the revolver had grown warm in the night-long grasp of the watching owner's hand.

Selina had all the intense, the intolerant pride of personal respectability and honesty, that marks the American working-woman. She had never owned a dollar she had not earned twice over. Not one penny of Charles Paul Lavalle's money had she ever accepted from that hour of discovery; though he had cursed her for cruelty in denying his milk-white babe the comfort that money could provide. And this pride of integrity she had passed on to May, who truly believed the one disgrace in poverty was an acceptance of anything unearned. Therefore it had been an awful shock to learn that one of her own name and blood had proved dishonest. For the time being the cruelty to her mother even was lost sight of, in this great overmastering shame of being sister to a thief! "Oh!" she groaned and turned shuddering from the word! "I must! I must get away at once! I must! This place will be unendurable now and, besides, that smiling devil seems to have settled down in this State. I must get back to Cleveland if I have to beg for work on my knees—get back before he discovers me and follows for my little May! Where under heaven can we find safety? Will neither God nor man free me from this incubus!"

She rose softly and stole to the entrance of the

bridge to see if dawn was near. There had been times during the night when it really seemed that the old structure must totter to its fall, and now in the dim gray light it looked very gaunt and frail. She made out a house roof not far off, and saw, quite near, that very common feature in local scenery, an abandoned log cabin, the successful farmer generally locating his larger, better building ungratefully far from the old home.

"Why," Selina mused, "had we known of it, May and I might have found shelter there last night—what a pity!" then stopped—stared. "Was not that a man crouchingly approaching the cabin?" Suddenly she added, "If I can see him—he can as easily see me," and hurriedly entered the bridge again. "Some one skulking about, seeking shelter in an empty cabin, might mean evil." Then she laughed: "What are you doing, Mrs. Marsh," she asked, "but skulking about—do you mean evil? Just as soon as it is clear daylight, we must set out to tramp to Brother John's house. If May only had a morsel of bread first or a glass of milk. Poor mite—it will be hard for her!"

She never once in her mind gave Jason credit for the forethought he had really shown, in sending at the first whitening of the eastern sky his boy Will, mounted on a fresh horse, to notify John Parsell of the disappearance of Selina and May, and asking him to look for them, as he, Gallaway, couldn't give him any idea

where they had gone. So already John Parsell, with at the thought of their exposure to the storm of the night, was searching for his sister and niece, and finding they had not sought shelter at Grandam Gallaway he was making his way toward Cy Toler's place, hoping they might have been taken in there.

When Amabel had lashed the horse with her cloth after her reckless jump, the animal had gone tearing over the road in a very frenzy. Masker, thrown backward on the seat, had barely saved himself from falling to the ground, and after securing the reins, he had finally gained control of the worn-out animal; but the buggy was damaged beyond his power to repair that night.

Remembering a barn of Cy Toler's that not only stood at a distance from the house but with its back turned houseward, he cautiously approached and deliberately put up his horse there for the rest of the night—meaning to repair the injured buggy, and be ready before sun-up.

To linger was not wise—that he knew perfectly. He might have mounted and got away in safety, but for one small drawback—he could not ride. Yet he seemed not much to care. A great wave of bitterness rose to his very lips. He had failed and the suffering of the past seemed mild compared to the jealous anguish that tore his heart as he paced up and down in the hut, wait-

ing for the coming of the raw gray dawn, that he might drive away.

Cut off from all by his act of mad folly—exiled by a too bold passion! If only he need not see her all the time—but her face was before him constantly! Sometimes the dewy dark eyes looked up gratefully, and then he caught himself trying hard to moisten his dry lips! Again he felt the dash of her hand in his burning face, and adored her for it—it was so like the helpless rage of a pretty, furious child! Then, oftenest of all, he saw the cold immeasurable contempt that drove him to a frenzy—the contempt that turned to a white and rigid horror of him, who had been beloved of many women! A horror that preferred broken bones, disfigurement or loss of life even, rather than to be his! A quick shudder shook him from head to foot! “Bah!” he said, “some one steps over my grave! Better that I step into it—if I already grow old! Ah!” he cried passionately, “if I could take her—the most beautiful!—with me into the grave safe from the eyes and the love of others! Ah, I suffer! Mon Dieu, yes! I wonder,”—he paused, a sort of startled surprise came upon his face with the dawn of an idea absolutely new to him—“I wonder—” he repeated, slowly, “if *they* cared—if they perhaps suffered—those pretty women whom I have loved and—laughed at! Celeste and little Justine? They were dead—before my marriage—of grief, ’twas said.” Yes, he dimly remembered that now.

He thought of Selina—the mock-wife and cried: “She’s taken my milk-white baby—let her suffer!”

His memory recalled smiling trusting faces in whose eyes he had extinguished laughter forever! Again the sharp quick shudder shook him. “Oh, damnation!” he cried, “let me be doing something! I’ll go for the horse! I wonder how many yokels are ‘packin’ an’ totin’ ’ guns for me by this time, or if the story’s out yet?”

As he cautiously advanced down in the hollow among the undergrowth, Selina, leading May by the hand, came out of the covered bridge—walking almost parallel with him, on the higher roadway. There was a short somewhat steep rise just before her and, looking up, she saw at its top a tall man standing, a gun on his arm and one hand shading his eyes. While she looked he put the gun down, climbed the fence and seemed to scan the fields closely. Standing erect, silhouetted in dark blue against the morning sky, Selina recognized him and wondered what Dred Hollister could be searching for, and why he carried a gun, as she knew he was not one of those who try to prove their manhood by indiscriminate slaughter of the defenseless creatures of wood and field.

Descending, he took up the gun and turned into a lane—looking at the ground as though tracking something. Just beyond and at her right the weeds and undergrowth waved, and Selina thought, “There is per-

haps the thing he's looking for, a colt, a heifer, a sheep, a something; it will have to break cover in a moment." It did—and a man straightened up from his stooped position, tall, broad with square high-carried shoulders.

Selina held back the rising scream—with teeth tight-clenched, never taking her eyes from the skulking man, in low almost savage tones, she said: "Back, May—back quick to the bridge! Don't stir until I come or call!" and the child knowing that but one thing in the world could put that tone in her mother's voice fled, in blind terror, back to the dim dustiness of the bridge, stammering mechanically over and over a morsel of prayer: "The power and the glory ever and ever—the power and glory——"

Selina pushing the carpet-bag into the weeds, watched the man while following him at a little distance. He was inside of Cy Toler's fenced pasture lot. There were a good many saplings growing about and at the far corner, nearest the barn lane, there was quite a thicket of hazel bushes.

Masker, topping the rise, swept a quick look, not about him, but ahead. "I'll put myself behind Bay Billy," he thought, "and Bay Billy will keep the whole county behind me—only let me cut across to the shelter of that thicket and the game is mine!" He started to cross the open space when the pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat of running feet, coming up the lane behind him, caught his ear. He heard the scramble of climbing feet, the thud

of the jump from the fence top. A thrill ran over his body—there were tiny needle-point prickles at the roots of his hair; but instead of the bullet he expected, came the call: "Stop! face about, and defend yourself! You know what I'm here for!"

Masker turned—saw the white light of death on the face before him; the savage desire to kill gleaming in the half-closed steely eyes, and in a flash remembered! "Harry Hollister!" he gasped, and knew the son would kill where the father had failed! That striking for Amabel, he would avenge his mother!

Masker did not throw up his hands to show himself unarmed—he laughed instead. Dred remembered that other laugh and went mad with fury: "Draw, you pestilence! you're armed!" he gasped.

"No, I'm not!" replied Masker, placing his hand in his hip-pocket to prove his words.

The gesture was misunderstood—Dred threw the gun to his shoulder! There was an explosion—a crashing fall—and Masker was down in the grass and the weeds—his right hand still turned beneath him! For a moment, Eldred stood looking down—then with set, white, unmoved face, laid his gun over his shoulder and walked away.

Selina Marsh, within sight and hearing of it all, had stood like one in a nightmare, incapable of sound or movement! Now, as if drawn by some power outside herself, she made her slow way toward the hazel thicket.

Oh, what a wreck! How big he looked, stretched out at length, like some great fallen pillar! One hand was turned under him—one clutched down into the rain-softened earth!

His face, so wonderfully little changed by the years, was grayish white; but all his broad chest was—— “Oh, God! oh, God!” she groaned.

As if in answer to that sound, his eyelids fluttered—lifted, and the dark eyes looked straightly but casually into hers—then steadied—clung—recognized!—and for the second time, Selina saw Charles Paul Lavalles eyes without mocking laughter in them, but with the pleading that was there when he had begged her to go to church and wed with him. And oh, eternal feminine! She drew her handkerchief and leaning over him softly wiped the drops of agony from his brow, the froth from the corners of his lips!

Again his eyes caught hers, with such an intensity of pleading and of inquiry, that she understood and answered as if he had spoken: “Yes, she is here—as fair as ever, your milk-white maid—all well and strong.”

A glance of gratitude he gave her—then under the torture of that torn breast, his brows writhed up and knit themselves—his mouth contracted horribly! Then came a hideous coughing gurgle in his throat—a quick shudder shook all his length and he stretched out long and still—and dead!

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She gazed at him for a moment. The face had not yet assumed the chill calm of death, but was still distorted with the speechless agony of his dying. A sudden panic seized her, and in the very moment that rendered him helpless to harm her ever more, she fled from him in terror—the blind senseless terror of the living for the dead.

But a swift new thought came to her and she clutched at a shivering young birch for support, gasping: "Dred, oh, my God, what will become of him?" She thought of the wretched childhood of the boy who was just beginning to make some headway against the contumely and contempt of these people. The lad who, through much love and a little learning, was catching glimpses of a new heaven and a new earth, and now because he had snuffed out the life of this laughing evil, he would be called upon for payment—blood for blood. His clean, honest young life would end with the black-cap—the noose—the scaffold!

She clung tight to the birch while the earth swung round with her; then as it steadied, memory was at work, recalling to her a trial at home where the accused declared that, knowing his enemy to be armed and mistaking his threatening movement, he had himself fired, believing his life in danger—and as a loaded weapon had been found on the dead man, the plea of self-defense had been accepted and the prisoner declared not guilty.

As a loaded weapon had been found upon the dead man—and, as a loaded weapon—again and yet again the words repeated themselves until at last they slowly came to have a meaning for her. That which had happened once might happen again. If a loaded pistol were found upon the dead man, a plea of self-defense might be offered—but there would be no weapon; for Charles Paul Lavalley had boasted always his contempt for shooting-irons, saying they were of more danger than value to the man who carried them. Yet if a loaded weapon could be found upon him? It—it was a cowardly thing to practise this lie upon a dead man—but the living must be thought of now. There was Hulda, who had suffered at his hands—and this boy, whom she had come to take such pride in. If a weapon could be found. Her hand crept into her pocket. She shuddered: “Can I do it?” she whispered. “Can I go back to—to that—and touch it?”

A moment she paused to gather up her courage, then turned and made her way back to the hazel thicket—and to what had fallen there. She tried to see as little as she could—and yet there was a weedy blossoming thing to which a bee clung seeking nectar, and the stem being too slender for the weight, the bee was bumping softly against the dead man’s brow; while a whole distracted colony of small ants ran hither and thither between and around those horribly clutching fingers.

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As if in answer to that sound, his eyelids fluttered—lifted, and the dark eyes looked straightly but casually into hers—then steadied—clung—recognized!—and for the second time, Selina saw Charles Paul Lavalle’s eyes without mocking laughter in them, but with the pleading that was there when he had begged her to go to church and wed with him. And oh, eternal feminine! She drew her handkerchief and leaning over him softly wiped the drops of agony from his brow, the froth from the corners of his lips!

Again his eyes caught hers, with such an intensity of pleading and of inquiry, that she understood and answered as if he had spoken: “Yes, she is here—as fair as ever, your milk-white maid—all well and strong.”

A glance of gratitude he gave her—then under the torture of that torn breast, his brows writhed up and knit themselves—his mouth contracted horribly! Then came a hideous coughing gurgle in his throat—a quick shudder shook all his length and he stretched out long and still—and dead!

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But a swift new thought came to her and she clutched at a shivering young birch for support, gasping: "Dred, oh, my God, what will become of him?" She thought of the wretched childhood of the boy who was just beginning to make some headway against the contumely and contempt of these people. The lad who, through much love and a little learning, was catching glimpses of a new heaven and a new earth, and now because he had snuffed out the life of this laughing evil, he would be called upon for payment—blood for blood. His clean, honest young life would end with the black-cap—the noose—the scaffold!

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As a loaded weapon had been found upon the dead man—and, as a loaded weapon—again and yet again the words repeated themselves until at last they slowly came to have a meaning for her. That which had happened once might happen again. If a loaded pistol were found upon the dead man, a plea of self-defense might be offered—but there would be no weapon; for Charles Paul Lavalley had boasted always his contempt for shooting-irons, saying they were of more danger than value to the man who carried them. Yet if a loaded weapon could be found upon him? It—it was a cowardly thing to practise this lie upon a dead man—but the living must be thought of now. There was Hulda, who had suffered at his hands—and this boy, whom she had come to take such pride in. If a weapon could be found. Her hand crept into her pocket. She shuddered: “Can I do it?” she whispered. “Can I go back to—to that—and touch it?”

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With whitened face, she wrapped her skirts tightly about her that they might not receive betraying dabbles, and so knelt. Then drawing forth her revolver—"Only May and brother John know I own this," she whispered—she tried to place it in the hip-pocket. A slight hollowing in the earth beneath him made it possible for her to do it without tugging at the body.

Then having done her loyal best to save Hulda's boy, she rose and fled as if pursued by fiends—down the hill—over the fence—and on to the bridge, where she hoarsely called on May to come!

Once more they started—a trembling silent pair, and as they neared the rise again, May exclaimed: "Oh, Mama, isn't that my Uncle John?"

Selina looked and sent forth a piercing cry: "John, oh, Brother John!"

White of face, John Parsell turned from the dead man whom he had nearly passed on his way to the Toler house. He came on the run to his sister: "Selina!" he cried, "Thank God! I've found yer safe! Come home with me now, dear! But oh, good Lord! an awful thing has happened! I met Hulda's Brat just now—with a gun on his arm, and he never even saw me. He was coming from this direction too, and here lies the dead body of Masker—all shot up and not cold yet! Poor devil!"

"It isn't Masker!" interrupted Selina, in a dry expressionless voice.

"Yes, it is, dear. I bent over him and looked closely at him—it's the traveling agent, Charles Masker."

"John, there was no Charles Masker. The dead man up there in the thicket is the man you offered to shoot on sight. He is May's father, Charles Paul Lavalley, the bigamist."

She wavered forward a step, caught weakly at her brother's arm, and for the only time in her life, fainted!

where they had gone. So already John Parsell, wild at the thought of their exposure to the storm of the night, was searching for his sister and niece, and finding they had not sought shelter at Grandam Gallaway's, he was making his way toward Cy Toler's place, hoping they might have been taken in there.

When Amabel had lashed the horse with her cloak after her reckless jump, the animal had gone tearing over the road in a very frenzy. Masker, thrown backward on the seat, had barely saved himself from falling to the ground, and after securing the reins, he had finally gained control of the worn-out animal; but the buggy was damaged beyond his power to repair at night.

Remembering a barn of Cy Toler's that not only stood at a distance from the house but with its back turned houseward, he cautiously approached and deliberately put up his horse there for the rest of the night—meaning to repair the injured buggy, and be off before sun-up.

To linger was not wise—that he knew perfectly. He might have mounted and got away in safety, but for one small drawback—he could not ride. Yet he seemed not much to care. A great wave of bitterness rose to his very lips. He had failed and the suffering of the past seemed mild compared to the jealous anguish that tore his heart as he paced up and down in the hut, wait-

ing for the coming of the raw gray dawn, that he might drive away.

Out off from all by his act of mad folly—exiled by a too bold passion! If only he need not see her all the time—but her face was before him constantly! Sometimes the dewy dark eyes looked up gratefully, and then he caught himself trying hard to moisten his dry lips! Again he felt the dash of her hand in his burning face, and adored her for it—it was so like the helpless rage of a pretty, furious child! Then, oftenest of all, he saw the cold immeasurable contempt that drove him to a frenzy—the contempt that turned to a white and rigid horror of him, who had been beloved of many women! A horror that preferred broken bones, disfigurement or loss of life even, rather than to be his! A quick shudder shook him from head to foot! “Bah!” he said, “some one steps over my grave! Better that I step into it—if I already grow old! Ah!” he cried passionately, “if I could take her—the most beautiful!—with me into the grave safe from the eyes and the love of others! Ah, I suffer! Mon Dieu, yes! I wonder,”—he paused, a sort of startled surprise came upon his face with the dawn of an idea absolutely new to him—“I wonder—” he repeated, slowly, “if *they* cared—if they perhaps suffered—those pretty women whom I have loved and—laughed at! Celeste and little Justine? They were dead—before my marriage—of grief, ’twas said.” Yes, he dimly remembered that now.

He thought of Selina—the mock-wife and cried: “She’s taken my milk-white baby—let her suffer!”

His memory recalled smiling trusting faces in whose eyes he had extinguished laughter forever! Again the sharp quick shudder shook him. “Oh, damnation!” he cried, “let me be doing something! I’ll go for the horse! I wonder how many yokels are ‘packin’ an’ totin’ ’ guns for me by this time, or if the story’s out yet?”

As he cautiously advanced down in the hollow among the undergrowth, Selina, leading May by the hand, came out of the covered bridge—walking almost parallel with him, on the higher roadway. There was a short somewhat steep rise just before her and, looking up, she saw at its top a tall man standing, a gun on his arm and one hand shading his eyes. While she looked he put the gun down, climbed the fence and seemed to scan the fields closely. Standing erect, silhouetted in dark blue against the morning sky, Selina recognized him and wondered what Dred Hollister could be searching for, and why he carried a gun, as she knew he was not one of those who try to prove their manhood by indiscriminate slaughter of the defenseless creatures of wood and field.

Descending, he took up the gun and turned into a lane—looking at the ground as though tracking something. Just beyond and at her right the weeds and undergrowth waved, and Selina thought, “There is per-

haps the thing he's looking for, a colt, a heifer, a sheep, a something; it will have to break cover in a moment." It did—and a man straightened up from his stooped position, tall, broad with square high-carried shoulders.

Selina held back the rising scream—with teeth tight-clenched, never taking her eyes from the skulking man, in low almost savage tones, she said: "Back, May—back quick to the bridge! Don't stir until I come or call!" and the child knowing that but one thing in the world could put that tone in her mother's voice fled, in blind terror, back to the dim dustiness of the bridge, stammering mechanically over and over a morsel of prayer: "The power and the glory ever and ever—the power and glory——"

Selina pushing the carpet-bag into the weeds, watched the man while following him at a little distance. He was inside of Cy Toler's fenced pasture lot. There were a good many saplings growing about and at the far corner, nearest the barn lane, there was quite a thicket of hazel bushes.

Masker, topping the rise, swept a quick look, not about him, but ahead. "I'll put myself behind Bay Billy," he thought, "and Bay Billy will keep the whole county behind me—only let me cut across to the shelter of that thicket and the game is mine!" He started to cross the open space when the pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat of running feet, coming up the lane behind him, caught his ear. He heard the scramble of climbing feet, the thud

of the jump from the fence top. A thrill ran over his body—there were tiny needle-point prickles at the roots of his hair; but instead of the bullet he expected, came the call: "Stop! face about, and defend yourself! You know what I'm here for!"

Masker turned—saw the white light of death on the face before him; the savage desire to kill gleaming in the half-closed steely eyes, and in a flash remembered! "Harry Hollister!" he gasped, and knew the son would kill where the father had failed! That striking for Amabel, he would avenge his mother!

Masker did not throw up his hands to show himself unarmed—he laughed instead. Dred remembered that other laugh and went mad with fury: "Draw, you pestilence! you're armed!" he gasped.

"No, I'm not!" replied Masker, placing his hand in his hip-pocket to prove his words.

The gesture was misunderstood—Dred threw the gun to his shoulder! There was an explosion—a crashing fall—and Masker was down in the grass and the weeds—his right hand still turned beneath him! For a moment, Eldred stood looking down—then with set, white, unmoved face, laid his gun over his shoulder and walked away.

Selina Marsh, within sight and hearing of it all, had stood like one in a nightmare, incapable of sound or movement! Now, as if drawn by some power outside herself, she made her slow way toward the hazel thicket.

Oh, what a wreck! How big he looked, stretched out at length, like some great fallen pillar! One hand was turned under him—one clutched down into the rain-softened earth!

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CHAPTER XX

Kin of Stanway's

It was autumn. All the dead Indians of all the land might have been burning signal fires in their happy hunting ground so faintly smoky was this atmosphere. The country had wrapped itself in a garment of such surpassing splendor that the pearly grayness of the air became a necessary softening medium through which masses of vivid color met and overlapped without a jarring note of crudity—producing that chastened glory that makes the beauty of an American autumn the wonder of the world!

There was a cool reserve in the blue of the sky against which the flying wedge of wild geese looked more black than gray and most like a Japanese sketch, until the “honk-honk-honk!” of a leader gave convincing proof of living reality. Nuts were tapping, rattling or thumping as they fell according to size and weight.

Here and there a very forehanded farmer had got in his corn and the fodder was cut and standing in big shocks, while ungathered pumpkins wallowed helpless in the hollows of the field. Portly, with fair promise, each one did its rustic, flattering best to imitate the sun—so round and big, golden and shining, they lay

there beaming broadly back at every warming ray. Pumpkins that were looked upon with a favoring eye by all men and by many animals; they were indeed the glory of the rough brown fields!

The greater part of corn gathering was yet to be done, so husking-bees were being looked forward to; apple-paring parties were on the tapis and two quiltings were positively announced.

A "new feller" from Calhoun county had taken a piece of land "offen Wash Gallaway," and was for house-raisin', as soon as corn and apples were done with, and "Wash was goin' to give a reg'lar settin' down feed to everybody that packed off down there, yes, sirree, by gosh! and a dance after! Why? Wal, no, Wash warn't in the habit of givin' blow-outs, but that girl of hissen was settin' up alone Sundays and the new-comer was a bachelor man, so you see?"

It was evident that the excitement caused by recent occurrences was not yet calmed down, and the number and variety of these social functions proved that the people still found pleasure in thrashing over the old straw was plain. Wash Gallaway alone had another motive in giving his entertainment. "Why," cried Mother Brown, "even Cy Toler—close-fisted Cy—who allers had favored old Zachary's meannesses, Cy Toler had got a worsted dress for Lavoisy, his wife, true as preachin', a delaine—purple some say, but Essie Toler, she as was my gal, Essie Brown, says it warn't so, that

it war green with purple sprigs, an' she had a piece cut outen the arm-hole to prove it by. Cy said right out that his wife had to have the duds so she could go to all the gatherin's an' see if she couldn't pick up some new word or other about that Gallaway bust-up. There warn't no call for his woman to be kept in the dark, he said, when anything was going on; and every one says Lavoisy Toler's steppin' pretty high these days, the shootin' bein' done right on their place; an' what between men-people trompin' about lookin' at the spot, an' women-folk comin' to see if the delaine is delaine an' whether its purple or green and tryin' to get scraps of it to see if the color's well set—she's plumb sot up! But she's got one pill to swaller she don't like, for Cy Toler don't buy like young Dred Hollister does. Huldys dress is new clear through—hide, flesh, bone an' marrow! Linin's and cordin's and bindin's, whalebones and buttons, an' everybody knows *shank* buttons cost money. While Lavoisy's bare outsides is new, but her innards are all old—old hooks and eyes, a string for cordin', no bindin' at all, and her whalebones to be soaked and straightened out and oven-dried. But then that's Cy all over. Wal, if you can't give me no new word of what's goin' on, I may as well be gettin' 'long hum. Jest settle them lower bundles for me, will you? That pair of shoes I got over to Marceline swings too loose and the bundle rapraps the old mare and she stops and makes a try to

bite 'em—the durn'd old fool! Lordy! don't I wish I could see Mis' Marsh awhile, I'd worm suthin' outen her. John Parsell took his mother over to his place last Thursday, and they'uns had a long pow-wow, you bet. I ain't seen one female woman that's sent airy invite to Mrs. Jay Gallaway, what d'ye think of that? I ups an' says if the hull community give me the cold shoulder like that, my man would have suthin' to say, I says; and they say, oh, well, your man and Jay Gallaway are different, an' then, too, Mrs. Gallaway's health wouldn't let her go prancin' round over rough roads, an' stretchin' her arms over quiltin' frames—an' there you are. Oh, thank you! Well g'long Betsey. Now doggone her! she's been haulin' all summer an' she's took to backin' up agin things when she first wakes up. Now, when I start her agin, jest you give her a switch from behind to keep her from backin' into the fence corner."

The farmer obeyed with such emphasis that Betsey bolted in a short-lived panic, every bundle flopping and rapping. Mrs. Brown bounced high and came down hard, and with her bonnet dancing briskly between her shoulder blades, sent back one whole sentence with many fragments of broken ones: "Dod—dod rot you!" she jerkily cried, "I didn't tell you to fire me outen no cannon!"

No, the excitement was not over, though by the sympathy of the people, the conduct of the sheriff and the calmly determined attitude of Mr. Stanway, a

magic circle of safety had been drawn about the boy who had so rashly taken the law into his own hands.

As old Bob Stanway stood crushing Dred's hand in his, he had asked: "Do you know what this may cost you?"

Dred's face was very grave as he answered: "Yes, sir—my life—perhaps."

"And you are sorry now for the reckless deed?"

The old man felt as well as saw the boy's start of astonishment—heard the immeasurable amazement of the slow: "Mr. S-t-a-n-w-a-y?"—that was all he could utter; and no one being by to see the action, old Bob leaned forward and kissed the lad upon the brow, saying: "Thank you, Hollister! I wish to God, that you were son of mine! At all events I can treat you like one, and I will!" a promise he had kept to the letter.

When the sheriff of Adams county first heard of the shooting, his anger had flared high: "Saddle my horse!" he roared to his boy, "and bring him out here quicker'n lightning! Now this here thing's got to stop! God darn it, what's the matter with Adams county? Be she in war paint and out for skelps, all the time? Hurry that horse, Bill Hinckley, or I'll give *you* a teching up! There's too much powder being burned among you fellers! No man dares say his soul's his own, it seems to me 'round Marceline! Who's been rolled over this time—an' what for? But I tell you beforehand, there's going to be made an arrest this time!"

The now sullen messenger replied: "Wal, this feller didn't have no soul to call his own. He com' round pretendin' business, but honest business men don't go tryin' to abduct gals, do they? It's that travelin' agent feller that's shot."

"Not?" interrupted the sheriff, with reddening face, "Not the man Masker, who—who—" He choked and stopped—he was recalling the girl who was kin of his, whose name had been linked with that of Masker.

"Yes, that's the feller, an' he didn't want anythin' worse than to abduct, and by force, the beauty of this here county—old Bob Stanway's only child, Amabel! When she 'scaped him Huldy's Brat took her home to her mother, an' then went out and killed the varmint!"

"Is he plumb dead then?" savagely demanded Hinckley. Then turning at the ring of iron shoes, he waved his hand toward the stable, saying. "Put that horse up agin, Bill!" and that was what the sheriff did about it!

Mr. Stanway had sent for lawyer Blair and guided by him certain formalities had been carried out, ending in the burial of the dead man in a far corner of a neglected, brambly, out of the way little cemetery.

A very ordinary detective might possibly have discovered poor Selina's trick, through the evidence of a woman's presence there, as her foot prints must have been discoverable on the rain-softened earth. Perhaps, too, her knee-marks where she knelt to push the revolver under that heavy, rapidly chilling hand—but no

detective was there. One or two men remarked upon the smallness and lightness of the weapon—that was all. Only one day, when the children down in John Parsell's log-house were romping wildly about, he had cried out warningly: "Take care there, youngsters, don't any of you jump on auntie's carpet-bag! Keep away, I tell you!"

Selina without a moment's thought, exclaimed: "Oh, let them play, there's nothing can hurt them, there now!" and then turned white—turned red, and swiftly left the room!

John followed her outside: "Selina?" he asked in a low voice, "You—er—you don't mean? you didn't—you couldn't!"

"Yes, I did!" she broke out suddenly. "I know it was an awful thing, and I have not stopped dreaming of it yet—but I did it! I did it John, trying to serve the boy! Dred believed he was armed, because he twice cried: "Defend yourself!" and I thought if it were found there—the weapon—it might help to—help to——"

"Perhaps it has," said John patting the distressed woman's shoulder after the manner of sympathetic manhood. "Perhaps it has—for though nearly the hull community was with Dred Hollister, I noticed that Stanway's lawyer kept harpin' on Masker's comin' here with evil intent, and comin' armed, which looked all the worse when several men declared that on his previous

appearance he had had no weapon on him at all! Yes, Selina perhaps it did help the boy—Iord knows you meant well; but where you got the grit to do it, is what puzzles me! That's what made you faint right square off that-away, and no wonder! Poor sister, you've had a tough time down here—you plumb have!"

Yet the excitement caused by the shooting had been mild compared to that aroused by a more recent occurrence. A matter trivial to utter inconsequence, to an outsider, but here in this isolated, quiet corner of the world, just as swarming bees cling frantically to one single object, so the interest of the whole community clung and buzzed about this discovery anent one in their midst.

One day when the watching Amabel had seen her Dred leaving the house at the end of a momentous interview with her father, for between hope and fear, in a humor half-defiant, half-timid and coaxing she suddenly flung into her father's den; sat herself upon his knees; snuggled her forehead into his neck, and with her left hand nervously twisting his hair into nice smooth little rat-tails, she proceeded to tell over again the story he had just heard—but with a warmth, a color, a fulness of detail that had certainly been lacking in Dred's respectful but curt and tense statement of his love and hope!

Old Bob held her close and tried gently to reason with her, as to their too great youth, and Dred's present poverty, etc., and when she agreed with him, she

snuggled closer, and when she disagreed, she kicked out her slippered feet and pulled hard at the particular rat-tail she chanced to be twisting just then.

At last she broke out: "Oh, yes! yes! I know all Mama's views, don't repeat them! She means to have me marry lawyer Blair's younger brother and live in Quincy, for all her secret dislike for Down East people! But, father, I never thought *you* wanted to get rid of me."

"Amabel!"

"I thought you would be glad to have me here, beside you, always!"

Many kisses—many assurances—and then after a pause, a little very grave talk: "Amabel! my little one! it's hard for father to think of you as a grown woman already; but I see dear, you love this lad now—wait dear, hear me out, one or two things I must say to you. My little girl, have you looked ahead at all? Your temper is quick and imperious, you love your own way, —which is apt to be a generous, warm-hearted way, I own—but, child, Eldred, though very sensitive, is masterful. He is, I think, capable of severity!"

Her voice was very quiet as she interrupted him: "I do not think you can teach me anything about Dred's temper, father, or his character. There is no touch of cruelty in his severity, and no severity unless he is goaded to it."

"One other word then, child: This is no ordinary farmer's boy. He is a born naturalist, I truly believe;

and now that books are opening to him he is ablaze with passionate ambition. Amabel are you sure you will never become jealous of his books, his studies?"

"Why, Father dear, I went all over that ground long ago. You forget that I can sketch more than respectably—I can even help Dred a little—he says so—and then, perhaps, I might have duties of my very own, some day—I might you know, Father! (she whispered)—and how could I be jealous of mere books then?"

"How, indeed!" he half laughed, with wet old eyes, as he rocked her back and forth, just as he had done when she was eight and had come in tense anxiety to discuss the possible arrival of a doll on Christmas. And so to her he kept silent as to certain unpleasant remarks of his wife, anent Dred's father and his father's family and people—if he ever had any!

But troubled and anxious he drove out alone to think matters over, and returning homeward he passed Old Man Toler's, and stopped a moment to speak to Hulda, about this matter, of love between their children.

He was shocked at the effect the shooting had had upon the poor woman. She spent half her nights upon her knees, praying God to let her suffer for the wrong done by her boy! She was languid, spiritless, wretched—until in their conversation Mr. Stanway let her know that his wife's family pride was keeping Amabel and Dred apart.

"You see Mrs. Hollister, your father has always

implied that you were not a widow, that, of course, would prove your husband a scamp of some kind. She says he might turn up some day and bring shame upon the young people?"

Hulda's eyes were brightening—her cheeks were growing red: "She also fears, that he, your husband, might come of undesirable blood—or might have no grandfather, I suppose she means." He ended impatiently.

Hulda, with head high, answered: "My husband was a wicked man, but Mrs. Stanway will not mind that, I suppose, when she knows that his family was probably as good as her own, whoever she may have been. The Hollister's of New Orleans were not held to be of undesirable blood, nor the Le Noirs!"

"W-w-who of New Orleans? Your husband was a Hollister of New Orleans? Was his name Harry Eldred? Oh, thunder and Mars! Eldred then—but—but where is your husband?"

"Dead!" she curtly replied.

He took her hand: "Mrs. Hollister this is amazing, beyond words! Won't you put your bonnet and shawl on and come home with me? I'll bring you back! Your father? Oh, let him take care of himself, for once, he's old enough. These poor children might as well have the gates of their Eden thrown open for them, if it's in our power, and I believe it is—for ma has no objection

on earth to Dred personally—it's only that she won't get down off that family hobby of hers."

Hulda had been roused at last! She came out directly and got into the buggy beside Mr. Stanway, and they drove rapidly away. She had in a package two or three old letters with the New Orleans post-mark and two old daguerreotypes. On the way she told Mr. Stanway briefly and simply the story of her husband's death; and to the pity that had been in his heart for years, for this unhappy drudge, there was now added a great reverence.

Seated in the sitting-room, while Mr. Stanway went in search of his wife and Amabel, Hulda opened the pictures and looked long at them. One was of a woman, whom she had never seen in the flesh, the other was a young dandy of a period twenty-two years gone by—they were Harry Eldred Hollister and his mother. She left them open on the table and walked about the room, looking with greedy eyes at the books and pictures. She stopped before a Madonna. Tears rose to her eyes. Even she, the stainless mother of a stainless son, suffered! It's so hard to understand! We are charged to go forth and multiply, and when we obey we suffer, we suffer! Her eyes sank to the innocent solemnity of the baby face, with the wee hand wandering breastward, and a smile of remembrance, of exquisite joy touched her lips.

She had not heard the entrance of others, and just

as Mr. Stanway spoke her name, a startled cry rang through the room: "Good God! my Aunt Hollister! where did that come from?" Holding out at arms length with both hands one of the pictures.

"Where did this come from?" she repeated.

"It is mine," said Hulda.

"Yours? Why, I tell you, this is my Aunt Hollister, of New Orleans?"

"That may be," admitted Hulda, coldly, "but it is also the picture of my mother-in-law!" Then at Mrs. Stanway's unbelieving look, she added: "Do you not see what is written there?" A narrow slip of yellowish paper was gummed across the cover, and on it was written in small delicate characters "For Hulda, my son's wife, with my love and good wishes." "Which did not keep her from bemoaning his madness in marrying a mere, ignorant country girl, for her pretty face in this letter (touching one), which came to my husband by the same post."

"Do you mean to tell me?" cried Mrs. Stanway, "that you—you were ever the wife of our handsome, reckless Harry?"

"There's my marriage certificate!"

Mrs. Stanway stood at gaze—a long moment, then turning she said: "Well, Robert Stanway, did you ever hear such a thing in your life? A Hollister drudging her life away on a farm not two miles away from a Le Noir?" and to the stupefaction of Amabel and her

father, she walked over to Hulda and kissed her on both cheeks. "Well, since you were handsome Harry's wife, you are, of course, my Cousin Hulda, and I hope you will let me treat you as a relative!" Then catching a glimpse of the toil-worn hands, she cried out: "Oh, you poor dear! If I had only known, things might have been so different!"

She placed the utterly amazed woman in a chair and began to pour forth family history. How that Mrs. Louise Hollister had been the only sister of her father—Louis Le Noir; and how old Grandmother Le Noir had idolized young Harry Eldred Hollister, and 'er——

Old Bob had slipped out to return presently with the young giant, who, puzzled and uncomfortable, looked from face to face for enlightenment, and when Mrs. Stanway paused to catch her breath, her husband, with twinkling eyes, led Dred forward, saying: "Let me present your second cousin to you, Mrs. Stanway!"

And that good woman rising, said: "I always knew you had good blood in you, you dear big boy!" and kissed him with a particularly explosive kiss, which marked her most expansive moments!

Dred heard Mr. Stanway's laugh and saw the amusement on Amabel's face. His chin thrust itself forward; a sullen look crept into his eyes. For a last moment he was "The Brat," believing himself the butt of some new joke. Then with a start he saw that Mrs. Stan-

way, while her tongue rattled happily on, held his mother's hand in hers, and gratitude and wonder swept the sullenness all away!

"Amabel!" said Mr. Stanway, "take Eldred away and reduce his eyes to normal size, by explaining matters, for any further distension will result disastrously."

As she smilingly led Dred out, she gave her father a look from her lustrous, lashy eyes, that plainly promised him certain young bear-like hugs, when next she found him quite alone.

After tea Dred was asked to drive his mother over home, to her great pleasure, and at the start, as the young pair stood for a moment together, it was evident that they had found out the open gate and had entered into their Eden. Dred held the girl's hand just one moment—he made no sound, but her clinging eyes saw his lips form the word, "Beloved," and an absolute radiance came into her face, in happy response.

"Eldred!" called out Mrs. Stanway, "be sure you tell your grandfather that my Cousin Hulda is coming over for a couple of days next week. I shall drive over and get her myself! She can't possibly remain cooped up in his kitchen, as she used to do, and if he says one disagreeable word Hulda, do you come here for good and all! And see how he likes being alone! Good-by!"

This was the thing that had turned this small world

topsy-turvy—for the Stanways were as the Royal Family of the place. Old Bob's ability, his sturdy honesty, his rough-and-ready good nature made him popular; while his money, his education and his beautiful daughter made him quite their idea of an aristocrat! Hulda's Brat—the boy whose very food was begrudged him; who had been denied even the country-boy's education; who had alternately been jeered at and used for his woodland knowledge; who had been the butt of their rustic clowning—Hulda's Brat was kin of the Stanways! Kinship acknowledged by them too—not claimed by him!

They had never heard of King Cophetua and his beggar maid, but if they had they would not have considered the lifting of the maid to a throne, a patch on the wonder of the bewildering honor come to The Brat, in being kin of Stanways!

CHAPTER XXI

Conclusion

The word went around that old Bob had said at the blacksmith's that he traveled now with a black-snake whip in his wagon, that it might be handy for any man or boy who used the expression "Huldy's Brat," and that Eldred would hereafter trounce anyone he knew of who did it.

"Exceptin', of course," broke in the smith, "the old feller who started the name on the boy; old man Toler'll be just mean enough to stick to it."

"Think so?" responded Mr. Stanway. "Now, I reckon the old man will drop that habit, and perhaps too he may not ride so roughshod over his daughter hereafter."

Far and away these words flew, and they had their effect. So "young Hollister"—or "Dred"—or "that young fellow Eldred" took the place of the contemptuous "Huldy's Brat" with surprising swiftness, while every one turned and reviled old man Toler.

Dred alone seemed calm and unchanged. Up by candle-light—never a moment to himself, till evening-time—then there was one blessed hour with Amabel, and the books.

"Oh, Dred!" she cried once, "why did you let Mrs. Marsh and little May have all the joy of teaching you—could you not have trusted me, dear?"

"I was ashamed; and you know, Amabel, you did not care for me then, and you might have turned from me forever."

"Eldred Hollister, for such a clever man, you can be the stupidest creature! I didn't care—indeed! Well, listen!" (she stood up straight and lovely before him, with frowning brows but with laughing eyes, as with an extended forefinger she ticked off her words)—"listen! Ever since that horrid, pudgy little Brown boy called me, 'Black-eye, pick a pie,' and pitched me into the snow-drift, and you pulled me out by my heels and hooked the snow out of my neck with your cold little fingers, and brushed me off, and lifted me on to a log where I could better see you thrash him—ever since that lovely trouncing, I have been waiting for you to ask me to marry you—not care, indeed!"

And Dred cried, "Oh, what an adorable fib!" and as little May once said of him, he laughed clear up into his hair; and while he covered one pink palm with kisses, he thrust the spelling-book into the other, saying: "Hear me, sweetheart! See if I can spell down this line of four syllables correctly." Thus love-making and education advanced hand in hand, in Mr. Stanway's dusty old den. Then came the final happening, that was making all coming social functions actual neces-

sities, in the way of safety valves. Selina Marsh was going back East and was going to take Grandmother Parsell with her! Had a third of Adams County caved in, it could not have created such a sensation. After that scene at Gallaway's, Kate had in blind, senseless rage thrown the entire blame of discovery upon the loyal woman who had never breathed a word of the knowledge she possessed. Stricken with a very ague of terror when she heard that Selina was about to return, Grandmother Parsell had begged John to take her to Selina, and there she had implored her daughter: "Oh, take me with you!"

"Mother! oh, mother! I want you more than anything in the world; but, dear, I am so poor. Suppose I should fail to get work at once—or suppose I could not provide you with ordinary comforts?"

"That sounds like mockery, daughter, knowing what you know of the comforts I receive now. Selina, if you leave me, I shall die of terror and misery! Why, even now, Kate's children are forbidden to speak to me. Oh, I cannot bear it! I want so little, dear! A bit of bread, a sip of tea, a chair in a corner out of the way, a little love from you and baby May, and peace—a few days of blessed, healing peace, before the coming of the great eternal peace!"

On this scene old man Toler arrived, coming to urge Selina to go to law for her inheritance—to force Gallaway to make restitution. But Selina was obstinate.

She would not drag the family disgrace before the world. Her sister's condition of health was her shield—excitement might kill her. "No, let her keep the money she had obtained at the cost of her character—God knows she gets no happiness from it!"

Then Toler plumply and plainly asked her to marry him; and struggling desperately against the hysterical laughter rising in her throat, she refused him. "You would not be marrying me, but that will instead. My sister would not be safe one month from suit. Yes, I know your object is to obtain justice for the widow and the orphan, but, you see, justice comes too high, this time!"

And old Zachary forgot his church membership long enough to swear, as he cried out in real suffering: "Oh, it's worse than throwin' money out of the winder. Gol'durn it, you good-lookin', fool-woman, can't yer see, you're encouragin' evil—you're rewardin' the wrong-doer, an' me jest a honin' to gurd up my loins and jump in an' fight for yer rights? Mis' Parsell, can't yer beat no sense inter yer daughter? Hev' yer tried?"

Suddenly Selina bethought her: "Mr. Toler, I believe you really do wish to help us—mother and I—and while I can't allow any claim of *mine* to be pressed, I will authorize you to go to Jay Gallaway and demand for mother that small sum grandfather left to her as an evidence of his regard. If he will settle that matter at once, right out of hand, I will leave him in peaceful

possession and go my way.” And that trifling matter being better than nothing to fight about, old man Toler, with grim set jaw and bristles up, made straight for the Gallaway place; and next day but one the fifty dollars—swelled now by years of interest to the princely sum of seventy dollars, was neatly stitched into Grandmother Parsell’s waist, and word went forth that she would go with Selina Marsh and little May to Cleveland, Ohio.

Selina made her preparations quickly, and the soft warm shawl and neat black bonnet, with its ties of broad black ribbon with purple corded edges, filled her mother with a wondering pride and tremulous pleasure that was pathetic to see. Several tea-drinkings had been attended, and many little gifts were offered Selina; and she in turn was able to show them two entirely new patchwork patterns—one known as the “Rocky-mountain chain,” being what Mrs. Wash. Gallaway wanted for “her gal’s weddin’ quilt.”

Catharine had not spoken to her mother from the moment she returned from her visit to John, in “the bottoms,” and when the old farm-wagon passed slowly by the small house, and stopped, Grandmother rose, and trembling like a leaf, put on the bonnet and shawl that had been sent to her, and coming out she extended a hand to ‘Lonzo, who shook it heartily, and said savagely to the children: “You all go an’ tell a good woman good-by, if yer know when yer well off!”

So they came one by one, and somewhat sheepishly kissed her.

Jay Gallaway clambered over the fence coming from the barn, and tears rose in his little black eyes as he put his big clumsy arms about the frail old woman, and said: "Good-by, mother! I'm doggon'd sorry 'bout—'bout everythin', yer know—but Seliny'll be mighty good to yer, that's shure!"

She looked up piteously: "Jay," she whispered, "she—Kate, she hasn't said good-by, and she's breaking my heart, Jay!"

He looked incredulously at her, then called cheerfully: "Kate! oh, Kate! com' erlong out an' kiss mother good-by!"

The short little woman came to the door, and white-faced, looked at them, with pale phosphorescent eyes.

"Kate, my daughter," pleaded the old mother, "you will never have to speak to me again—never in all the world, dear; but say good-by to me, just good-by!"

For answer, Kate stepped inside and slammed the door. A gasping cry came from the old woman's lips. "She's my wife," said Jason, "but she's a doggon'd cruel woman! Don't cry, mother, don't!" And 'Lonzo, as he flung down the rails to spare a dangerous climbing over, commented: "And the Lord passes over wickedness like that in silence, after feedin' bears on merry little boys, who only called Elijah's attention to his baldness; an'

if that ain't workin' in a mysterious way, I'd like ter know what is!"

Grandmother Parsell was so broken by sorrow and humiliation that she really needed the support her son-in-law gave her—so there was another painful moment when Jason faced Selina. He lifted grandmother into the wagon, and as she sank into the chair awaiting her, Jay said in a low, shamed voice: "Thank yer, Selina." She couldn't answer—then he added: "I reckon yer don't care ter shake hands—yet yer takin' 'way the best thing we had in our family."

Selina held out her hand quickly: "Good-by!" she said, "and thank you for being kind to mother."

Then he stepped down from the wheel-hub, and suddenly Mother Parsell leaned over and whispered: "Jay—Jay! she was my last baby—Kate was, and I—listen, Jay, if she ever should change—feel a bit sorry, you know, you'll tell her, won't you, that mother loved her and left a good-by blessing for her?"

"Yes, mother, I'll tell her, an' God bless yer! John, I reckon you'd better be gettin' on, them new-fangled steam cars don't wait for folks much"—and they moved on.

Every here and there, someone stopped them to say good-by—to gather points about that purple-edged ribbon, and wish them God-speed! But down in her heart Selina felt just a little hurt that her "fine boy," as she called Dred, had not come for a parting word:

"Ah, well," she thought, with a half-smile, "he was only the 'Brat,' when I was teaching him to read—now he is kin to Stanway, and the man who is left in charge. Well, things change—so do people, it's the way of the world!" And she thought of other things, while holding her old mother's hand close in hers.

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hands to the man whose ready action had saved the poor beasts and their obstinate driver; and it was his embarrassed laugh that, reaching May's ears, made her cry out: "Oh, mamma, mamma! that was our dear Mr. Dred!"

Next moment they were at the platform, and Mr. Stanway and Amabel came forward to greet and assist them—while Selina's heart warmed within her as Mr. Stanway said: "We could not let our old neighbor and our visitor leave without farewell and God-speed."

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So with tender care these two—Dred and Amabel—who now saw the world through the rainbow radiance of their love, made comfortable the frail old traveler, leaving too a picture book for May and a daintily

stocked lunch-basket for all. And Amabel, laughing and blushing, whispered: "Mrs. Marsh, I want you to kiss me and forgive me, because I—I used to be jealous of your blue eyes."

At the very last, Dred held Selina's hands hard and tight: "If only I might have served you!" he said, and she dared not tell him he had set her free forever, by his dread defence of Amabel. Blushing like a girl, he gave her a little golden key—a mere charm, but arranged to be worn as a pin. "To remind you of the key to knowledge you gave me, when you taught me my alphabet—God bless you and yours always!"

Looking out of the window as the train moved away, Selina noted the protecting air with which Dred threw his arm about Amabel, to draw her back to perfect safety upon the platform. She waved a last good-by to the young giant of splendid promise, and sinking back into her seat, she murmured: "Truly, the right man is LEFT IN CHARGE."



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sities, in the way of safety valves. Selina Marsh was going back East and was going to take Grandmother Parsell with her! Had a third of Adams County caved in, it could not have created such a sensation. After that scene at Gallaway's, Kate had in blind, senseless rage thrown the entire blame of discovery upon the loyal woman who had never breathed a word of the knowledge she possessed. Stricken with a very ague of terror when she heard that Selina was about to return, Grandmother Parsell had begged John to take her to Selina, and there she had implored her daughter: "Oh, take me with you!"

"Mother! oh, mother! I want you more than anything in the world; but, dear, I am so poor. Suppose I should fail to get work at once—or suppose I could not provide you with ordinary comforts?"

"That sounds like mockery, daughter, knowing what you know of the comforts I receive now. Selina, if you leave me, I shall die of terror and misery! Why, even now, Kate's children are forbidden to speak to me. Oh, I cannot bear it! I want so little, dear! A bit of bread, a sip of tea, a chair in a corner out of the way, a little love from you and baby May, and peace—a few days of blessed, healing peace, before the coming of the great eternal peace!"

On this scene old man Toler arrived, coming to urge Selina to go to law for her inheritance—to force Gallaway to make restitution. But Selina was obstinate.

She would not drag the family disgrace before the world. Her sister's condition of health was her shield—excitement might kill her. "No, let her keep the money she had obtained at the cost of her character—God knows she gets no happiness from it!"

Then Toler plumply and plainly asked her to marry him; and struggling desperately against the hysterical laughter rising in her throat, she refused him. "You would not be marrying me, but that will instead. My sister would not be safe one month from suit. Yes, I know your object is to obtain justice for the widow and the orphan, but, you see, justice comes too high, this time!"

And old Zachary forgot his church membership long enough to swear, as he cried out in real suffering: "Oh, it's worse than throwin' money out of the winder. Gol'durn it, you good-lookin', fool-woman, can't yer see, you're encouragin' evil—you're rewardin' the wrong-doer, an' me jest a honin' to gurd up my loins and jump in an' fight for yer rights? Mis' Parsell, can't yer beat no sense inter yer daughter? Hev' yer tried?"

Suddenly Selina bethought her: "Mr. Toler, I believe you really do wish to help us—mother and I—and while I can't allow any claim of *mine* to be pressed, I will authorize you to go to Jay Gallaway and demand for mother that small sum grandfather left to her as an evidence of his regard. If he will settle that matter at once, right out of hand, I will leave him in peaceful

possession and go my way.” And that trifling matter being better than nothing to fight about, old man Toler, with grim set jaw and bristles up, made straight for the Gallaway place; and next day but one the fifty dollars—swelled now by years of interest to the princely sum of seventy dollars, was neatly stitched into Grandmother Parsell’s waist, and word went forth that she would go with Selina Marsh and little May to Cleveland, Ohio.

Selina made her preparations quickly, and the soft warm shawl and neat black bonnet, with its ties of broad black ribbon with purple corded edges, filled her mother with a wondering pride and tremulous pleasure that was pathetic to see. Several tea-drinkings had been attended, and many little gifts were offered Selina; and she in turn was able to show them two entirely new patchwork patterns—one known as the “Rocky-mountain chain,” being what Mrs. Wash. Gallaway wanted for “her gal’s weddin’ quilt.”

Catharine had not spoken to her mother from the moment she returned from her visit to John, in “the bottoms,” and when the old farm-wagon passed slowly by the small house, and stopped, Grandmother rose, and trembling like a leaf, put on the bonnet and shawl that had been sent to her, and coming out she extended a hand to ’Lonzo, who shook it heartily, and said savagely to the children: “You all go an’ tell a good woman good-by, if yer know when yer well off!”

So they came one by one, and somewhat sheepishly kissed her.

Jay Gallaway clambered over the fence coming from the barn, and tears rose in his little black eyes as he put his big clumsy arms about the frail old woman, and said: "Good-by, mother! I'm doggon'd sorry 'bout—'bout everythin', yer know—but Seliny'll be mighty good to yer, that's shure!"

She looked up piteously: "Jay," she whispered, "she—Kate, she hasn't said good-by, and she's breaking my heart, Jay!"

He looked incredulously at her, then called cheerfully: "Kate! oh, Kate! com' erlong out an' kiss mother good-by!"

The short little woman came to the door, and white-faced, looked at them, with pale phosphorescent eyes.

"Kate, my daughter," pleaded the old mother, "you will never have to speak to me again—never in all the world, dear; but say good-by to me, just good-by!"

For answer, Kate stepped inside and slammed the door. A gasping cry came from the old woman's lips. "She's my wife," said Jason, "but she's a doggon'd cruel woman! Don't cry, mother, don't!" And 'Lonzo, as he flung down the rails to spare a dangerous climbing over, commented: "And the Lord passes over wickedness like that in silence, after feedin' bears on merry little boys, who only called Elijah's attention to his baldness; an'

if that ain't workin' in a mysterious way, I'd like ter know what is!"

Grandmother Parsell was so broken by sorrow and humiliation that she really needed the support her son-in-law gave her—so there was another painful moment when Jason faced Selina. He lifted grandmother into the wagon, and as she sank into the chair awaiting her, Jay said in a low, shamed voice: "Thank yer, Selina." She couldn't answer—then he added: "I reckon yer don't care ter shake hands—yet yer takin' 'way the best thing we had in our family."

Selina held out her hand quickly: "Good-by!" she said, "and thank you for being kind to mother."

Then he stepped down from the wheel-hub, and suddenly Mother Parsell leaned over and whispered: "Jay—Jay! she was my last baby—Kate was, and I—listen, Jay, if she ever should change—feel a bit sorry, you know, you'll tell her, won't you, that mother loved her and left a good-by blessing for her?"

"Yes, mother, I'll tell her, an' God bless yer! John, I reckon you'd better be gettin' on, them new-fangled steam cars don't wait for folks much"—and they moved on.

Every here and there, someone stopped them to say good-by—to gather points about that purple-edged ribbon, and wish them God-speed! But down in her heart Selina felt just a little hurt that her "fine boy," as she called Dred, had not come for a parting word:

"Ah, well," she thought, with a half-smile, "he was only the 'Brat,' when I was teaching him to read—now he is kin to Stanway, and the man who is left in charge. Well, things change—so do people, it's the way of the world!" And she thought of other things, while holding her old mother's hand close in hers.

Then another small incident broke unpleasantly upon the monotony of their slow ride. As they neared the depot, they became aware of a wild commotion just where a side street crossed the iron rails, and next moment saw that a loaded wagon was stalled upon the track. In spite of warning shouts to turn his horses short off the track, the driver, stupid with drink and terror combined, went on madly flogging the poor creatures to useless efforts to go forward.

"Don't let mother see it!" called John to Selina, and she stood up to hide the threatened horror. Just then someone running like mad, and with something shining in his hand, broke through the shouting crowd. He reached the horses, and stooping, slashed furiously at the traces. As the freed animals dashed forward, stranger and driver both leaped free of the track, and the next second the engine with a grinding crash had darkened the air with hay, that was filled with wagon splinters.

The driver, with a cut forehead, rose and went loping off after his team—thanks were the last things to enter his mind; but there were others who held out their

hands to the man whose ready action had saved the poor beasts and their obstinate driver; and it was his embarrassed laugh that, reaching May's ears, made her cry out: "Oh, mamma, mamma! that was our dear Mr. Dred!"

Next moment they were at the platform, and Mr. Stanway and Amabel came forward to greet and assist them—while Selina's heart warmed within her as Mr. Stanway said: "We could not let our old neighbor and our visitor leave without farewell and God-speed."

As Eldred came up to them, Amabel cried: "Oh, Dred, are you always going to rush headlong into needless danger, like that?" The words were disparaging, but the beautiful face was radiant with loving approval.

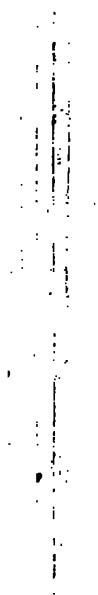
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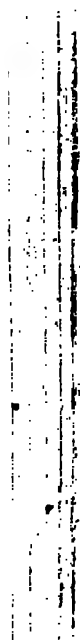
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